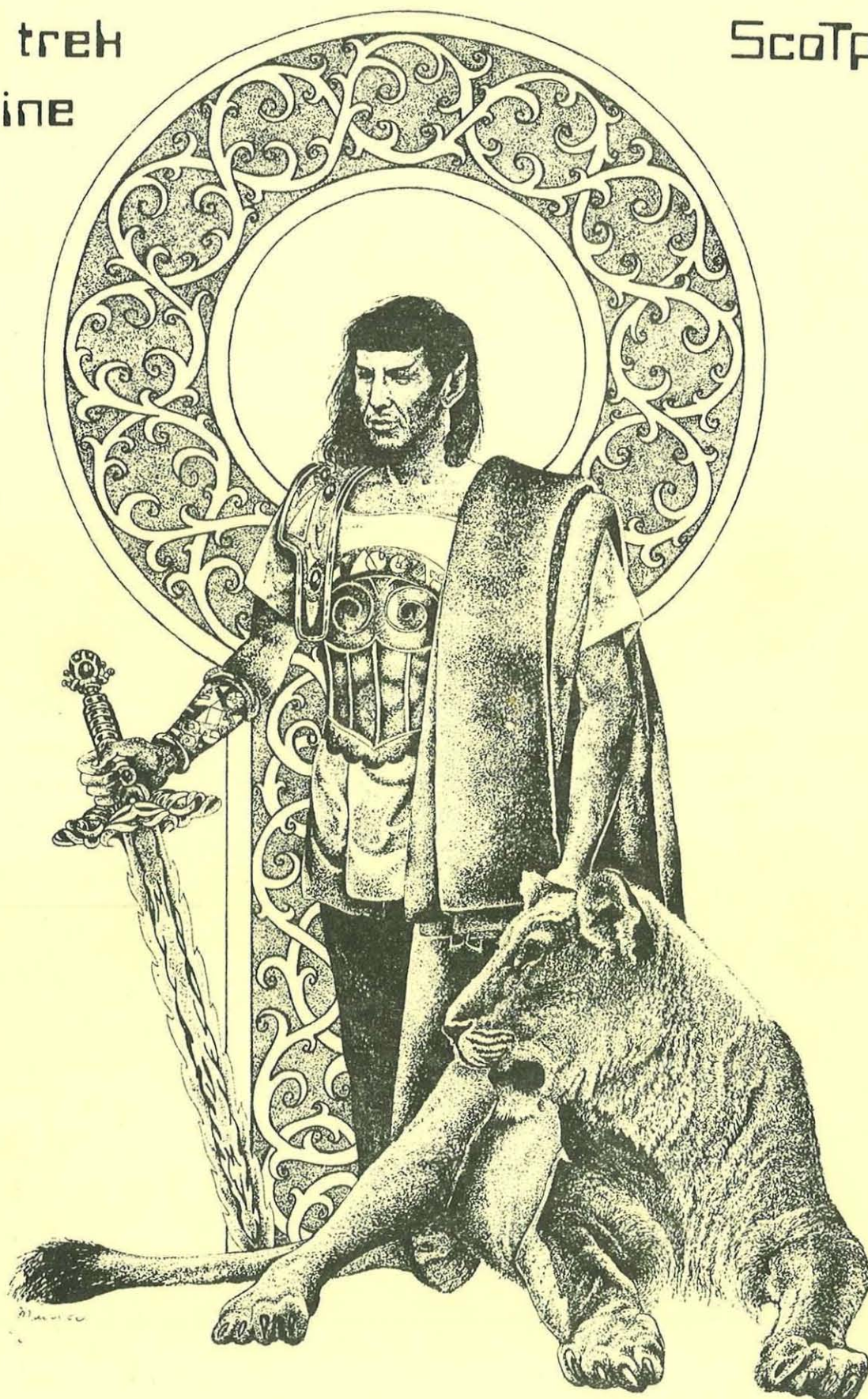


a star trek
fanzine

Scotpress



ENTERPRISE

LOG ENTRIES 75

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Scotpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona

Hello, and welcome to Enterprise - Log Entries 75.

I hope you like this issue's cover by Marilena Maiocco from Italy. It is quite a change from our usual series-based covers, but we simply couldn't resist this alternate universe Spock. In fact, I'm seriously considering having it made into a T-shirt.

Speaking of T-shirts, we have often been asked about selling shirts using some of our illos. We have considered this from time to time, but frankly we wonder if there is enough demand to justify the cost. If you would be interested in the idea in principle, please let us know, along with suggestions for the illos you would like to see used. We do have reproduction permission for several illos, and if there was enough interest we could seek the rights to others.

Pac Deacon has pointed out two typos in her story and one in her poem last issue. I can only apologise to all our writers and readers for the mistakes that have slipped through in our zines over the years. Unfortunately, we are not trained typists, so we cannot guarantee not to offend again!

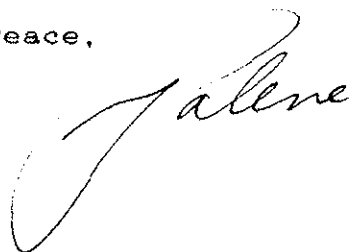
We welcome two new writers this time, Sharon Hyler from America and Jenifer Barnett from Canada; we hope to have more stories from them in future Log Entries.

All being well this issue should be ready in December, so Sheila, Janet and Shona would like to join me in wishing all our contributors and readers a Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year for 1988.

The next issue of Enterprise - Log Entries will be ready in the spring. We will also have 'Gsazara', a prequel to 'One Among You', by Alinda Alain. In addition, Sheila and I are hoping to get some writing done over the winter.

(Having now completed the editorial I can now release a little cat from durance vile. Whiskers has grown big enough not to be able to sit on top of the disc drive any more, but she still loves to dance on the keys.)

Peace,



Submissions of artwork, fiction or poetry are always welcome for ScoTpress zines, and should be sent to:

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THE WORTHIES

In all the tales of bygone days
The poets, with especial praise
Nine worthy men to honour choose:
Three Christians, three Pagans and three Jews.

Hector was dragged round the Trojan wall,
Julius Caesar divided Gaul,
Alexander spread his rule
From Macedon to furthest Thule.

Joshua was a general in Israel,
David the king wrote the psalms as well,
And the hero of Masada, Maccabee,
Makes up the tally of the Jewish three.

Charlemagne wielded a Joyous sword,
Godfrey of Bouillon was Jerusalem's lord,
And poets have written many a fable
About King Arthur and his famous Table.

Modern poets, mundane or fen,
Can you add others to the Worthy Men?

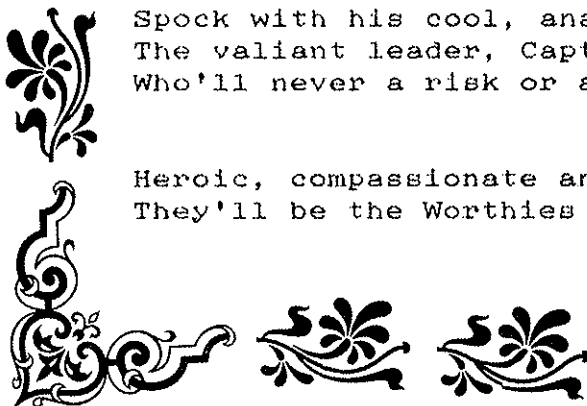
Spock had a semi-detachable brain,
Witchdoctor Bones almost cured the rain,
And many a lovely helpless girl
Was charmed by Kirk and his wayward curl.

(That doesn't make them worthy men?
Perhaps you're right: I must try again.)

The healer, McCoy, sharp-tongued but kind,
Spock with his cool, analytical mind,
The valiant leader, Captain Kirk,
Who'll never a risk or a duty shirk.

Heroic, compassionate and wise,
They'll be the Worthies of the Enterprise.

Lynette Muir



IN THE SPIRIT OF MAHAN

by

Sharon Hyler and Alinda Alain

The Vulcan materialised on the transporter. A Human stepped forward to greet him.

"Hi, Spock. Welcome home," Captain James T. Kirk smiled.

Spock stood motionless a moment, gazing at him intently. Kirk's smile widened, his hazel eyes warming with pleased affection for this friend. He signalled dismissal to the transporter technician as Spock stepped off the platform and came to face him. Long, slender fingers closed on his shoulders - an uncharacteristic action on the Vulcan's part, except in emergencies, or - even rarer - some special moment of sharing.

Uncharacteristic as well was the pressure now being exerted by the inborn strength of those hands which bore the long, slender fingers.

"Ah HA!" Kirk murmured, nodding as his stance became one of friendly teasing. "I knew it! You missed me." His smile widened in anticipation of the familiar denial of emotion that was Spock's usual response. Normally the Vulcan would have withdrawn into the formality that both knew for what it was, a front to keep the Vulcan image intact and functional.

"Indeed. I have missed you," Spock said with a fierceness that surprised the Human.

Kirk's smile vanished like a candle flame suddenly blown out. "Spock, did something happen? Has someone - or something - hurt you?" he inquired seriously, studying his friend's face.

The Vulcan's hands tightened fractionally, and Kirk suppressed a grimace of pain, not resisting the contact; his concern for his friend naturally overrode everything else.

"I... Yes, I... have been... hurt." Spock pulled Kirk closer to him, "and only you can ease the pain. Only you... Jim." The dark eyes gazed into his with a paralysing intensity now, the strong fingers moved slowly, carefully, from his shoulders to Kirk's temples.

Kirk almost drew back, but then stopped himself. Whatever was wrong with Spock, he was agitated about it and seemed in need of comfort... comfort his friend had indicated that only he, Kirk, had the power to give. Kirk forced himself to relax, his attitude and his eyes conveying to Spock that he was ready for the melding of the mind-link.

The Vulcan's strong fingers reached for and pressed onto the vital nerve centres of Kirk's face that aided in the mind-touch process.

Belatedly, Kirk realised that the permission Spock usually inquired after had neither been asked for nor given in the verbalisation Spock preferred. Puzzled, he looked up into his friend's face. The strangeness of the expression he was there confused him.

"Spock..." Kirk began, then gasped as pain tore at him, and he was forced by it to pull away. "What the... That *hurts!*" he exclaimed in surprised anger. He jerked away from the Vulcan's touch, holding his head, trying to ease a pain that would not be so easily soothed.

"What is wrong with you, Mister?" Kirk demanded, every word separately and distinctly pronounced because that was the only way he could speak through such pain as this. "You don't go into minds like that! I'm... no telepath. And you *don't* go into *my* mind like that either. That's too fast, too deep. I didn't have time... to adjust." Every emphasised word came through gritted teeth as Kirk struggled for a moment more to control that pain. He straightened up.

Facing the Vulcan, expecting an apology and an explanation, he was not prepared for what he received instead. The expression on Spock's face made him freeze in total disbelief.

"My Captain, eh?" A primitive smile of amusement curled the Vulcan's lips. "Indeed!" The smile turned into an arrogant smirk as he reached out once more. Powerful hands clasped either side of Kirk's head.

"Spock... My gods! What are you doing?" The Human's voice was choked with surprise, pain, and a slow-fired indignation.

"I need you, Jim Kirk." The Vulcan's eyes were as intense as the low voice, now keen with a kind of passionate intensity. "You are my friend. My only..."

Kirk backed away from the reaching arms, as the low voice continued.

"... friend. I need..."

"That's far enough, Mister." Kirk stopped his retreat when he felt the wall behind him. Backed into a corner within the small room, he aired some of the anger building up in him with an authoritative dignity that he had used on the Vulcan, among others, on various other occasions.

A sound, like an evil chuckle, came from the Vulcan, disconcerting Kirk all the more. In an instant he was pinned to the wall behind him with Spock reaching once more to establish the mind-touch necessary to meld with him.

"No... Spock... stop..." Kirk's hands clenched into fists. "Don't... I'm warning you!"

The Vulcan merely caught and held his captain's wrists in a vice-like grip.

McCoy stepped into the transporter room, a broad grin on his face. "Uhura tells me that our wayward Vulcan has..."

He stopped, staring open-mouthed at the scene before him across the room. "What *is* this? What are you two doing?" For a moment he was too amazed to comprehend fully that it was he was actually seeing. Then,

"Spock? What do you think you are doing to Jim?" He rushed forward, taking the Vulcan by the shoulders, remembering a bit belatedly about Vulcan strength.

With something like a snarl erupting from him, the Vulcan turned on McCoy, shoving him away. Again his attention returned to Kirk, only to watch the stalwart Captain fall to his knees, all but unconscious with pain and shock.

"What *have* you done?" McCoy yelled as he picked himself up and charged the Vulcan once more. His momentum this time succeeded in driving Spock to one side. "Are you mad? Jim!"

McCoy knelt beside Kirk as his hands anxiously moved, checking for some kind of injury other than the glazed look in Kirk's eyes.

"Is he all right, Doctor?"

Startled by the question, outraged by what he had witnessed, McCoy glared up at the Vulcan. "You expect me to think you care?" He asked the question with deadly quietness.

"I...care," the Vulcan replied savagely.

McCoy paused, trying to control his temper to get out the words he had to say before Spock smeared him all over the walls, when something in the Vulcan's demeanour caused him to stop, to study him just a little more closely.

Spock's dark eyes were fixed on Kirk as if he were seeing him for the first time in a long while. "Captain... Jim..." he murmured quietly as he dropped to his knees beside McCoy. He looked strangely helpless, strangely vulnerable as he extended a trembling hand towards his friend, towards Kirk.

Still shaken by what had occurred, Kirk shrank away from the offer of touch, but glancing at his friend's face and seeing the hopeless desolation that the other feared but would not admit to, he relented, grasping the other's arm firmly.

"Are... you all right now, Spock?" Kirk asked hopefully as he watched those eyes fill with an expression of relief that he recognised and knew well.

"I... have hurt you," Spock responded in a whisper of utter anguish and total disbelief.

"A... little." Kirk managed to sound convincing as a small smile surfaced to reassure his friend. "It was probably my fault, anyway. I shouldn't have broken contact with you the way I did. It's just that... I... wasn't prepared for you to meld with that kind of depth or intensity... or your aggressive behaviour... Unusual, uh, aggressive behaviour..." Kirk sounded uncomfortable to his friend, the mention of it bringing on uncomfortable feelings in them both.

Spock lowered his eyes, unable to meet those of his friends. "I beg forgiveness. I... am not myself..." He tried to explain. "The mission was so long, so hazardous... so... *isolating*."

Kirk and McCoy exchanged startled looks.

"What happened on the mission, Spock?" Kirk inquired gently, now aware more fully of his friend's obvious pain. "Command said it had to be aborted because latest information deemed it too dangerous to continue."

Spock nodded, slightly more in control now. "Yes. Aborted. But only *after* the deaths of the other members of my research team."

"Oh... I think I see."

"Do you? Do you, really, Jim?" the Vulcan asked quietly, his tone and manner conveying renewed feelings of bleak distress. "Do you *know* that I have spent six months alone on that planetoid? The others all died within twenty-four hours of our being left there!" He looked from Kirk to McCoy, allowing them to see the horror that was reflected in his eyes with the memories that merely talking about it brought up in him.

"They simply died. For no discernible reason. And then the communication equipment ceased to function altogether. I... lived..."

He faltered, and Kirk's hand on his arm tightened slightly in mute sympathy for what his friend had gone through, offering what comfort he could give.

"...on that planetoid, with my team dead, not knowing what it was that had killed them. I waited for it to happen to me. For six months... for six very long, very *lonely* months..." His hand settled over Kirk's. "I did not know if I would see you again," he whispered to his friend, looking into his hazel eyes. After a moment he turned that look on McCoy, including him as well as he reached out a hand to touch the doctor's arm.

McCoy got to his feet and walked over to the intercom in the transporter console. "Sickbay, I want two diagnostic tables set up for a complete physical for two patients, one a Vulcan. You got that?" He waited, then, "Right." He shut it off and turned to the two men who were watching him. "One for you, Jim - and one for *you*, Spock."

"It's all right, Spock," Kirk told him gently as the Vulcan tensed once more at McCoy's words. "You're home now. Bones is just going to check us over, that's all, make sure everything is functioning like it should be."

Spock's dark eyes met his. "Can you forgive me for... hurting you, Jim?"

"Sure." Kirk smiled at his friend, clasping the Vulcan's shoulder in warm, friendly affection. "I always forgive you just about anything."

A tiny smile flickered across Spock's face.

But when Kirk studied the Vulcan's eyes more closely, he couldn't be certain but he thought he saw a momentary glimmer of something... something that stirred uneasily and that caused an unsettled feeling in the intuitive bottom of his own mind.

Several hours later Kirk was still waiting in McCoy's office in sickbay. His physical had been completed hours ago, but McCoy had asked him to wait until Spock's had been completed as well. That was well over three hours ago...

Was something wrong with his friend?

NO! Then again... well... maybe... Spock had literally attacked him, had tried to force him into the melding of the mind-link... And he had seemed to take pleasure in his helpless struggling, and his pain...

"I thought you'd still be waiting," McCoy greeted his worried Captain, grinning, as he walked through the sickbay doors that led into his office.

"Is he all right, Bones?" Kirk asked anxiously.

"Well, I can't find anything *physically* wrong with him. But his psi-tests and the BWP did show a minute trauma of some sort... a minor irregularity, no doubt due to the experience he had to endure while still on Argus. I suggest you don't make any demands on him for a while. Just let him readjust at his own pace - which, knowing Spock, will be sooner than either one of us thinks he should. He'll be okay, Jim," McCoy reassured.

"Right." Kirk grinned at him, relieved.

McCoy sighed, sitting down with an air of relaxed contemplation.

"Is there something else, Bones?" Kirk asked curiously.

"Huh? Oh. No. Not really, I guess. It's just that... well... this experience must've shaken him a lot worse than he's letting on. I never thought I'd see the day when Spock would be so... open... around me. You, yes. There's a closeness between you two that goes beyond the average friendship, and has since the first moment... But me and Spock? Never. We get too much fun outa pickin' at one another. So, why now?"

"You said it yourself. Maybe this is just Spock's way of relieving the trauma he went through. You said it affected his psi-testing. Maybe it's more of a trauma than he's allowing to show on the tests you gave him. Besides, Bones, he's our Vulcan." Kirk stretched, trying to work a kink out of his left shoulder. "He *is* all right, though? Whatever killed off the rest of the team... Did you find anything out about that?"

"Yes... They died of radiation poisoning - massive doses of it. Their deaths were instantaneous - their exposure at that level made it impossible for it to be anything else but fatal."

What about Spock?"

"Nothing. No sign of it."

Kirk sighed deeply, slumping back into the soft chair.

"Has Fleet got anything to say 'bout this?" McCoy asked.

"Nothing much. An in-depth investigation is being conducted now, even as we speak. Apparently they've already questioned Spock. My orders now are to proceed with our next mission."

"You don't look happy about that, Jim. I thought that was the news you were chompin' at the bit to have."

Kirk shrugged, and stood to begin pacing the good doctor's office. "I don't know. I thought so, too. Now..."

"So... tell me what you think, Jim. You know Spock probably better than he does himself right now. If you think somethin' might be wrong..."

"That's just it, Bones. I *don't* know."

"I think you do." McCoy studied Kirk's reaction to his words.

"Right." Kirk stopped pacing and turned to face McCoy, choosing his words with careful, thoughtful accuracy. The words came slowly, as if to demonstrate the thought it was taking to create them in the first place. "Bones, Spock was a total *stranger* in that transporter room. This incident, the...uh... psychological trauma - do you think it will all...uh...pass eventually?"

"Far as I can tell it will. Jim, like I told you, this Spock is new to me, too. He's pretty shaken up right now... and I wonder. Death, in and of itself, wouldn't normally shake him up quite *this* bad... Well, *yours* probably would, but I don't think I need to tell you that, do I?"

"No, you don't." Kirk brushed that subject aside like a man who had already dealt with his own reaction to it long ago, and didn't intend to go through all that soul-searching again. He had lived on the edge too long. "So. He *seems* fine. Now, for all appearances and for the time being. Time..."

"And you," McCoy interrupted.

"... will have to rectify the situation on its own terms," Kirk finished flatly, glaring at McCoy in good-natured irritation.

Spock lay on the bed in sickbay. His body twisted restlessly, fretfully.

No...No... I will NOT let you... I CANNOT let you... Don't...

You can do nothing to stop me, Vulcan. I command. I am you... and I am the stronger of us. Your body, your mind... are mine to control. Mine to use as I see fit! Ah... your friend... this Jim Kirk... My, but he *IS* special, isn't he? So warm. So trusting... so caring... His emotional commitment to you is quite strong. Quite powerful. He will serve my purpose well, indeed. And I shall FEAST...

"NO!" Spock fairly shouted, unaware that he had spoken the denial aloud. *No! You shall never touch him.*

Do not attempt to command me, or to defy me... or I will use your precious Human as I did the others before I destroyed them while we were on Argus.

Spock mentally trembled, horrified. *No... I... will... obey. But you must not attempt to harm my Captain again, not in any way.*

I will not harm him, but I WILL know him. And touching HIS mind will be a delight I cannot overlook.

No. The Captain will fight you. He knows my touch as no other does. He will recognise you as the INTRUDER.

Then it is up to you to teach me how to reach him in such a way that he will not fight me. Perhaps YOU will convince him yourself. If he fights me, then I will win. And I will NOT be gentle.

"No..." Spock moaned, realising what was at stake.

"Mr. Spock?" Christine Chapel's concerned voice broke through the exchange.

Spock opened his eyes, slowly focusing on his surroundings and the blonde woman who had spoken so concernedly to him.

Ah. So beautiful, the alien mind-voice whispered in the Vulcan's already tortured mind. Another source of delight... another source of feasting. I shall enjoy this place...

No... Spock moaned internally, the alien now not allowing him to speak aloud his frustrations, not allowing him to warn this Human female of what was about to occur. He beat his fists mentally against the walls of the prison the Alien placed him within as the being took Spock's place once more.

YES. The Alien took over firmly, pushing Spock into the background where he could only watch what was about to happen.

"No..." the Alien moaned in perfect imitation of Spock's fevered threshing of a moment before.

"Sir?" Chapel asked, now more concerned about him than before. "Did you say something?" She wasn't quite sure she had heard him correctly when he had first opened his eyes and had seen her bending over him.

"Yes," the Alien responded, "I did. I said, 'It is good to see you, Christine'." He rose to his elbows and took her hand, proud of how well Spock's body had come to accept his commands as though they were Spock's own. Perhaps he would keep the body a while longer, and merely discard its former inhabitant when he was tired of playing with it. "I thought of you a great deal during these past months."

"Y-you did?" Chapel was amazed. Never had Spock spoken thus to her, let alone taken her hand in his own.

"Yes, very much."

"Uh... sir... I'm afraid I don't understand..."

"Ah, but I think you do." He squeezed her hand meaningfully.

She stared at him, somewhat perplexed, her heart pounding. Finally, however, she managed a small, unsure smile.

The Vulcan's features copied the expression precisely as strong. hands reached up, took her shoulders, and drew her down to meet him

in a kiss.

Captain Kirk. Doctor McCoy.

The two Humans jumped, startled, as they looked around the office for the source of the penetrating, non-verbal communicator. At the far corner of the room, near the doorway, they saw the vaguely subliminal outline of some sort of humanoid entity.

"Who are you?" Kirk demanded, even as McCoy moved cautiously near the intercom to alert Security that there was an intruder aboard. "What are you?"

I must speak with you both. I will await you in the Captain's quarters. The entity vanished.

McCoy looked at Kirk.

"Let's go." Kirk stood up to leave, his face thoughtful.

"What about Security?" McCoy followed him out. "We should take precautions."

"I don't think we need them, Bones." His voice was quiet, equally thoughtful as they stepped out into the ship's corridor.

"What!?" McCoy glared at his Captain as though he expected him to skip down the corridor and start turning cartwheels any second.

"I have a feeling about this, Bones. Come on."

"Where have I heard that before?" McCoy grumbled under his breath as he followed Kirk.

"What?"

"Nothing."

Minutes later, inside Kirk's quarters, they faced the mysterious, insubstantial entity.

I am Olrac. The mind-voice of the one they faced now spoke to them. I am come in pursuit of Eturns, a rebel, a criminal of my society who has taken possession of the entity you call Spock. Entire possession, of body as well as mind.

There was a sharp intake of breath from Kirk, his suspicions that he had been about to drop now confirmed.

"Oh my gods," McCoy breathed. "Possession. What all does that entail?"

Eturns can control the entity's bodily reactions. The voice was deadly calm.

"Spock... What about my First Officer?"

He lives, and is himself, but he has no power to overcome such a being as Eturns or myself once we are joined with the corporeal material of forms like yourselves. Do you understand me?

"Is there nothing that can be done for our friend?" McCoy asked.

Eturxs must be destroyed.

"Destroyed? How?" Kirk felt a knot beginning to grow and twist in the pit of his stomach.

By the destruction of the mind and the body of the one Eturxs now inhabits.

McCoy took Kirk's arm and guided him to a chair as he swayed, realising fully what was being discussed. "Jim!" But for a moment Kirk was beyond his reach.

Kirk looked up at the entity who studied them quietly, the light ever shifting against its surface. There was no distinction in its features. He sighed, and shook off the emotions that threatened to engulf him. There was too much at stake for him to be able to afford the luxury of wallowing in them. He was a starship captain, and lives depended upon his making the right decision, no matter what was at stake. Part of him died inside.

You and the Vulcan are very close. Eturxs will know that, want that for himself. He cares nothing for anyone but himself, and he will do anything to find gratification, to satisfy sensation. The depths of feeling that you and the Vulcan have for one another can only draw him to you in an effort to satisfy a baser need. You are in grave danger, one called Jim Kirk. I sense it.

"We've already had some proof of *that*," McCoy stated flatly. "It attacked Jim when it came aboard with Spock. It tried melding with him to form a mind-link."

I trust you were not injured, Jim Kirk.

"No, I wasn't," Kirk answered; did he sense concern for their well-being from the entity that now faced them? "If Spock was there... and he was, because I could sense him - then he interceded for me in some way."

It is possible. To have been controlled by Eturxs for so long, and to be still independent, to be still self-willed, is a great accomplishment for entities such as yourselves. Your First Officer must possess a strong personality in his own right, Olrac replied thoughtfully.

"He does," Kirk agreed. "I know he survives. There has to be another way, Olrac. I don't want my First Officer..."

And your friend?

"... to be killed in order to destroy Eturxs. There has got to be another way."

I do not mean to appear unsympathetic to your concern, but Eturxs is a great evil for your friend to endure, and to force that endurance upon him when something may be done is extremely cruel to the corporeal entity called Spock.

"Isn't there some way to force Eturxs to leave Spock long enough for you to destroy him yourself?"

No, there is no other way. Eturxs cannot be forced to leave the

corporeal host's form. However, there do seem to be times when Eturxs is not with your friend. It takes time for entities of our composition to adjust to your lower level of being, your material solidity, and Eturxs does sometimes separate himself from the one called Spock. It is possible that, if the symbiosis has not gone too far, Eturxs can be destroyed during one of those periods without serious damage to your friend.

Hope brought back the life into Kirk's eyes.

I sense that you wish for us to attempt this way, Jim Kirk.

"I certainly do."

Then we must plan with great care if we are to be successful. If Eturxs survives he will then be forewarned and will not, without extreme caution, leave your friend's corporeal form again, and there will be no other choice for me but to destroy them both. Do you comprehend me?

"I understand," Kirk responded evenly. "What is it that you require to be done?"

It would appear that Eturxs leaves your friend's body as he sleeps, when Eturxs would consider him unable to escape him physically.

"Vulcans can go for days without sleep," McCoy interrupted, "if the need is great enough. We could be waiting for quite a long time before we get the chance to do anything."

"So, we just have to persuade Spock to relax, to let go..."

"And just how do you propose to do that if Spock figures that he's fighting for your life too? He may never go to sleep again!"

Kirk was stopped at the door of his quarters by the eerie voice penetrating his mind in warning.

One called Jim Kirk, I must warn you of Eturxs. He will see and know everything that your friend does, says and hears, even while they are apart. There is no way to warn your friend but that Eturxs will know as well.

Kirk opened his mouth to respond when Olrac continued, It is unwise for you to be alone with either one of them at this time.

"I'll take the risk, but... thank you for the warning," Kirk told Olrac grimly. "Spock is still there. He won't let Eturxs harm me." He picked up his communicator and watched as McCoy slowly produced one of his own. "You wait in here with Olrac, Bones. You'll know when you get my call..."

"Jim," the doctor called after him, and he turned back. "Be careful."

"Of course, Bones. Isn't that what 'Tiberius' means?"

With a wry smile he was gone, and McCoy turned back to the entity named Olrac as he sat down to wait.

At first, Eturxs had been gentle with the Human female. A little forceful now, but he was becoming impatient. Still, until now he had not considered that it might take pain to get what he wanted from her. He began to increase the pressure of his hold on her, began to tear at her clothing, watching her face as a good deal of the material began to rip under his hands. He grinned ferally.

"Mr. Spock... No... Don't... Wait..." Chapel struggled futilely against the Vulcan strength. "Please... Not like this... Not here..."

The Vulcan's eyes shone with a cruelly gleeful anticipation. "Yes. Here. Now," he growled at her, using his strength to force her back against the bed. "Right now. I have waited long enough. You have played too many games with me, Christine. Now is the time to realise the fruition of those games. Stop fighting me... You will enjoy what is to come if you will only stop fighting me..."

He grabbed the collar of her uniform, intending to rip the fabric away from her body, when she suddenly relaxed in his hold. Startled, he looked down at her to see her gazing up into his face. Thinking that she was now ready to comply with his needs, he relaxed his hold on her and she suddenly slipped off the bed and almost out of his grasp before he grabbed her wrist in preparation for throwing her back onto the bed and taking her roughly in whatever form this body with its increased strength would allow him.

He increased the pressure of his hand on hers until he could feel the bones strain to keep from breaking, and she was nearly on her knees in front of him from the pain. "I said I would not wait any longer, woman, and I will not."

Eturxs was startled at the voice that spoke to him.

"Spock!"

The commanding tone of the voice forced the two of them apart. Christine Chapel was trying to get what was left of her uniform back into place, along with her hair, as Kirk strode into the room.

"As you were," Kirk said, before he gave a double take, suddenly aware of what might have taken place had he not interrupted as he did. "Excuse us, if you will, Nurse Chapel."

"Yes, sir." Chapel hastily exited the room and Kirk stood there, watching Spock watch her go, not certain what was keeping him from trying to follow her, hoping he could stop him somehow if the Vulcan tried.

Instead, Spock relaxed against the bed, dark eyes studying the Human figure before him.

"You've had an exhausting day, Mister," Kirk told him, his tone light and friendly despite the anger that was beginning to build again within him. "I think you'd better get some rest, don't you? If I have to, I'll make it an order."

"An order?" The unfamiliar curving of the thin lips was a cruel mockery of Spock's own rare natural smile. "And what if I refuse to obey?"

Kirk shrugged as if it made no difference to him. "Then I guess McCoy will sedate you. Either way, you'll be getting the rest you need."

The dark eyes reflected the inner struggle of emotions over that prospect. "I will not allow that, Jim. If you make it necessary, I am quite capable of defending myself."

"Hmmm, yes. No doubt you would, my *Vulcan* friend."

Suddenly there was a switching of tactics. "Why are you standing all the way over there, Jim? Have I done something to make you afraid of me?"

"Afraid? Why should I be afraid of my First Officer? Is there some reason, something that I do not see, that should make me afraid of you?"

"Anger, then. Perhaps it is I who fear. Fear that you have not forgotten, nor forgiven me for the actions of this afternoon."

"What's to forgive? I know you, Spock. You didn't mean to hurt me, not intentionally, anyway."

Abruptly the Vulcan swung his feet to the floor and rose, taking one step towards Kirk. Kirk tried not to tense; if this was a test of his words then he had better damn well pass it, if only for Spock's sake.

"Hold it. Back to bed. McCoy's right, you're not well enough to go running around the ship yet." Kirk's tone was naturally light this time. He stepped forward, resting his hands on the lean shoulders with the idea of guiding the errant Vulcan back to his sickbed.

Instantly long Vulcan fingers reached for the proper places in preparation for the melding to form the link that was deep between them. Any other time Kirk might have welcomed it, but now... The only thing this creature that had taken Spock wanted was to feast... Wasn't that how Olrac had put it? That this creature was drawn to Kirk because of the strength of the warmth he and Spock had between them? The strength of the friendship between the two of them ran deeply into their souls. No matter how drawn to Kirk this creature was, he was destroying Spock, and Kirk was not about to let that happen. He would not go down without one hell of a fight.

Kirk's grip on the Vulcan's shoulders tightened a moment, then...

"What have you done?" Spock whispered.

The hypo hidden in Kirk's hand hissed as its load was released directly into the Vulcan's bloodstream.

"Sedative. You should be asleep for about eight hours, maybe more. Now you'll get the help you need, Spock."

"Nooo..." The Vulcan moaned as though in great pain. For an instant Kirk was certain it was Spock who spoke to him. Spock, in great, soul-tearing pain.

"Jim... you... do not... understand." It was a great struggle to get the words out. "You must... get away... Go... Please!"

Then the baleful glare returned to the dark eyes, and Kirk knew that Eturns was looking him over once more.

"I'm going to help you, Spock," Kirk told the already limp form quietly as he guided it back onto the bed, placing the lean body of his friend on it with great care as he felt the weight of a thousand worlds descending on his shoulders. His skin began to prickle, and he stepped away from the now sleeping form, watching as a mist began to rise from it, to rise and take a kind of ethereal shape before him.

Kirk retreated to the doorway, and drew out his communicator. Yes, Eturns was following, leaving Spock behind him.

"O1..."

A sinister laugh filled the room as the door behind Kirk whooshed shut and stayed solidly closed behind him. Kirk backed into it as the communicator shot out of his hand.

"...rac," he finished. He watched numbly as the communicator bounced across the floor towards the thing that held Spock in its possession.

At last. At last we meet, Jim Kirk. And this time there will be no-one who will interfere.

Kirk's back was against the wall. "What is it you want?" he demanded, looking for an escape but already knowing there wasn't one.

Why are you so afraid of me? I am a part of your Vulcan. A part deeply buried, rarely allowed to surface. I am of no harm to you. Only when Spock is unconscious can I be truly free. Free as you see me now. Why be afraid of what is Spock? Spock would never hurt you.

Surprise registered on Kirk's face, matching the surprise he felt within. Eturns was trying to convince him that it was a part of Spock; the incorporeal life form was even beginning to look like Spock... a little. But Kirk remembered the research team, the memory of Spock's description of them, and the computer record of it that the investigating team had come up with recently. This creature could never be a part of Spock. Olrac's warning solidified in his mind. The team had burned to death in a radiation bath that only the computer, due to its special construction, had been able to withstand. But that didn't explain how Spock had survived.

You must understand about me. And you must help me, Jim Kirk. I AM a part of Spock, but I am a part that rarely, if ever, is allowed to surface long enough to be able to... touch you... Tonight all of that will change, all the loneliness will end. I must be allowed to touch you. It is my need, my obsession. It is... my life. Will you not accommodate your old friend, Jim Kirk? Please? It would give to my existence a purpose.

The entity's mind-voice became hypnotic, drawing Kirk in a direction he didn't want to go. Kirk began trying to concentrate on coherent thoughts, and stumbled out the suddenly opened doorway behind him. He moved slowly, forcing his limbs to answer his need, to a smaller treatment room away from Spock, hoping the entity Eturns was following.

Eturns was indeed following the Human who was giving him an

exciting, although useless chase through the sickbay. The small room he was now headed for was sealed at the other end, and when Eturxs entered it, it would be sealed altogether. He concentrated on making his mind-voice exactly duplicate Spock's, and on enjoying the thought of feasting on this Human's spirit.

Spock fought the sedation with every fibre of his being, knowing, even while physically sedated, that his friend - his brother in more ways than even he himself understood - was in a danger far worse than that referred to as mortal danger.

His eyelids felt leaden as he forced them open. There was no time to consider the weakness of the body. His friend needed him. Jim's voice broke into his drugged awareness as he struggled to rise, to gain control of his heavily sedated body once more.

"No... You won't... You can't! Spock would never... use force... on another life form. The meld doesn't allow it if it is to be successful. No!"

Kirk's voice floated back to Spock, and his course of action was instantly decided for him, dictated by his friend's need for help, which was obvious in the pain-soaked voice, in the determination not to give in, no matter what the cost.

With a great effort of will from somewhere deep within Spock strength to overcome the physical limitations of his drugged body swept through him. He half rose, half rolled off the bed, and hit the floor with jolting force. Never before had he been so aware of the effect of gravity. The suddenness of the fall did much to revive him, the pain of it giving him the wedge he needed to overcome the drug's effects on him. But it was Kirk's mental emanations of distress, of pain so acute that words could not describe it, that drove Spock into actions he could never have completed otherwise.

"Jim!" Spock called out the name as he rose to his feet with an effortless grace that belied the fact that he had fallen like a dead weight to the floor only instants before. He concentrated on his goal, ignoring the body that still threatened to fall under him at any moment, as he entered the treatment room and moved towards the two figures involved in a rather lopsided game of Cat versus Mouse.

McCoy paced back and forth the short distance in the corridor outside sickbay. "Something must've gone wrong - Jim should've been using that communicator by now." He stopped and faced the ethereal haze that was Olrac. "It's takin' far too long, if ya ask me. Jim would've been callin' us before this. I tell you, something's gone wrong."

I must agree with you. Olrac sounded thoughtful. The voice came from nearer McCoy's shoulder than the ethereal haze he'd thought was the formless being. I think it is time I entered this now.

"I think so too, Olrac," McCoy answered, but the voice, the nearly formless haze, and the sense of presence were all gone before McCoy could form the second word of his sentence. "It's about time!" he muttered under his breath as he opened the door to sickbay and went inside.

Spock was not in the bed McCoy had placed him in, and as he turned to consider where else the often errant Vulcan might be he heard the commotion coming from the room off to his left. Thinking of what that commotion could mean, he ran in that direction. Coming up against the stubborn, often stuck door, he cursed that he hadn't thought to get it repaired before this. He pounded on it, yelling for it to open or else, when suddenly it opened and he fell into the middle of the scene that was suddenly clear before his eyes.

A brilliant haze, like Olrac only somehow dimmer to his perception, was fighting Kirk and Spock. Everything they threw at it, it tossed back at them with frightening ease. At times it was Spock who stood in front of Kirk; at times it was Kirk who stood to protect Spock. The uniqueness of their friendship was clear as they stood side by side, trying to find the one thing that would defeat the enemy who floated in front of them.

You cannot think to defeat me with such toys as these. Foolish, foolish mortals... for such you are to a being such as myself. Mortal. And all too vulnerable for your own good or protection. I am far superior to you. Your fragile bodies of clay, your simplistic minds, are no match for my own. Kneel down and worship your master. I am Eturxs..."

There was more to the name, but to McCoy it sounded like gibberish. Apparently it didn't translate well for mortal ears and understanding. McCoy moved away from the door as he felt rather than saw something move past him into the room with them.

I can take you at my pleasure, you stupid fools. And my pleasure is now!

"No!" McCoy yelled at the creature hovering above his friends.

Startled, but demoniacally amused, Eturxs turned to face this new intrusion and focused on McCoy, who suddenly realised that his position was quite precarious. He swallowed and tried to step back, all at once aware that he couldn't move.

Another of your foolish companions, eh, Vulcan? Eturxs made the word 'Vulcan' sound like something people stepped in, and Kirk smouldered silently as he helplessly looked on, knowing what this thing would do to McCoy and knowing that neither he nor Spock could prevent its occurrence.

Then perhaps you and your friends need further instruction on what is to occur to those who attempt defiance, no matter how useless that defiance truly is. Was that a smile Kirk thought he saw plainly in the midst of where the Creature's features should be? That evil smirk?

Then FEEL the death of one close to you, one you deem to be helpless before me. I shall first feast upon him, and then will allow you - both of you - to be a part of his death throes as I discard him for the useless thing he truly is.

Kirk's eyes widened as Spock made a valiant try for McCoy, only to fall back to the floor as Eturxs tossed him away from the Human. The weight of gravity around both Kirk and Spock increased until they were totally immobilised and unable to do anything but watch

helplessly as Eturxs moved closer to their friend.

Eturxs moved closer to McCoy until he was almost on top of him, then extending what were apparently arms, the Alien enfolded McCoy against him in what Humans would call a bear hug. McCoy was silent for a moment, and then their ears were filled with the most horrible screaming ever uttered by a Human.

At the sound Eturxs raised its head and studied the Vulcan and the Human before him. Apparently pleased with the sounds McCoy made, which were now reduced to a hoarse weeping, he released the doctor, who immediately dropped to his knees on the floor and began to sob uncontrollably in horror.

Eturxs watched with all the attentiveness of a cat that had not yet begun to toy with its prey and reached for McCoy once more, taking him by the shoulders. As Kirk and Spock actively voiced their defiance and their empty threats against him, the Alien calmly lifted the doctor against himself once more. Then he pushed McCoy a little away from him and took his face between new-formed hands, staring into the doctor's blue eyes as he allowed McCoy to see just what was in store for him.

After letting the knowledge settle fully in the doctor's mind he roughly pulled him close again, once more enfolding the doctor in the destructiveness of the Feasting Energy which Eturxs delighted in using and which was forbidden among his own people. But here...

Kirk and Spock both felt the heat in the room rising to a feverish temperature, and Kirk asked, "Is that what happened to the research team?"

"Indeed. Only much faster a process than now. Eturxs seems to be toying with the doctor, for our benefit."

Kirk grimaced. "Where's the cavalry when you need them?"

Suddenly the room was filled with a blinding light, and Eturxs, in surprise, dropped McCoy and turned in a circle, trying to discover the source.

You are finished here, in this world, Eeturxsqz... And the rest of the words, if indeed they were such, became just so much gibberish to the mortal beings of Kirk, Spock and McCoy.

Suddenly freed, Kirk and Spock moved to stand over the now blessedly unconscious form of McCoy, to give what protection they could if Eturxs made any more moves towards their friend. But there were none. The tyrant was now worried for his own existence.

Olracxq! The mind-voice that had so threatened all they held dear only moments before was now shrill with a terror of its own.

The brilliant light that was now Olrac came and stood over the trio. Eturxs waited just long enough to see this development, and to watch as Olrac reached to McCoy, before he vanished. He was gone as though he had never been as Olrac touched McCoy, healing him instantly with a touch.

Forgive, McCoy. It was not meant for you to be injured, Olrac told the doctor gently. But you were not meant to be so involved, either.

STAR BASE 8 RODEO

by

Jan Davis

Enterprise Too was growing up. Tricia decided that it was time to start to train the foal ready for breaking in. The U.S.S. Enterprise was at Starbase 8 since the crew were due for some shoreleave. They arrived to find a Klingon ship already there and its crew taking shoreleave.

Tricia decided to take the young horse for a long walk. She took extra equipment other than the head collar and leadrope that Enterprise Too wore. In one of the base's parks, Tricia started to lunge the foal. Two young Klingons, both with the equivalent rank to Starfleet ensign, paused to watch her. Tricia ordered the foal to walk, then trot or canter round in a large circle, sometimes clockwise, sometimes anti-clockwise. On two occasions Enterprise Too had other ideas. Her head would go down as she headed towards one of the exits. Tricia, with equal determination would dig her heels in the ground. The fights were soon won, and Tricia remained the Master.

A gang of Tricia's fellow crew members arrived. Enterprise Too darted towards them dragging Tricia. They greeted the foal and fussed her. Mr. Scott turned to Tricia.

"Now, my bonnie lass, come along with us and have a wee dram. Don't ye worry about the wee girl, I'll arrange a bucket of water for her."

"Okay. Since you lot arrived, I doubt if I will get her to work any more." Tricia collected her equipment together and joined them with Enterprise Too in Harry's Bar.

"There you are lassy. Pull up a chair. Here's yours and that's your bucket, E.Too."

"Thank you, Mr. Scott."

"Scotty to you, lassie."

"Okay, Scotty, cheers." She raised her drink in salute to Mr. Scott.

A group of Klingons entered. Among them were Tricia's watchers. One spotted her and nudged his mate. They began to tell their mates about what they had seen.

"She made that animal go round on the end of a long lead." The first was talking loudly. "At various paces, using voice commands only. In her place I would have already started to sit on its back." His mate carried on in an equally loud voice.

Tricia sat tensely in her chair. Mr. Scott advised her quietly, "Steady, lass, just ignore the mindless....."

The two Klingons continued to make remarks about Tricia and her

handling of her foal. Finally, she had had enough; she jumped up and turned to the group of Klingons who were sitting behind her. "I have already witnessed the way your people treat animals. No way will any one of you handle Enterprise Too. For a start, she is not old enough to be ridden, nor is her back strong enough for a rider."

"You tell them, lassie." Mr. Scott muttered under his breath.

"You Earthie's are all the same, soft, right through to the core."

"Gentlemen, I can assure you, some of us Earthies are not soft but believe that gentle handling gets you further in the end."

"Huf!" the leader snorted, "typical Earthies dribble."

"Gentlemen, if you believe that, I am sure you will not be interested in my challenge."

"A challenge? A mere girl like you? What sort of challenge have you in mind?" The Klingon laughed at the idea. They were sure to win against a mere girl and an Earthy at that.

"Lassie, are you sure you know what you are doing?" Mr. Scott asked.

"Quite sure, Scotty. I would not challenge them otherwise."

The Klingon decided to find out more.

"Well, girl, what is your challenge?"

"To begin with, this Starbase, like many, keeps a number of Starfleet Riders' horses until they are required. I will arrange for one to be made available for us at 20.00 hours. Meet me on the Stable Deck at that time."

"Very well, we accept your challenge."

Tricia acknowledged the Klingon and swept out of the bar with Enterprise Too trotting behind her. The Klingons soon left. The crowd of Starbase personnel and the Enterprise crew started to place bets on the outcome of the contest. Many had recognised Tricia's insignia and were enjoying the joke. They all could guess the outcome.

20.00 hours arrived. Tricia stood waiting for her opponents, who were late. "Gentlemen, now that you are here, allow me to introduce Brutus. You are to have him tacked and mounted in half an hour. Be warned, he is half wild. I will leave you to it; goodbye and good luck." She left them.

There was a crowd of onlookers held back by barriers erected by the stable staff. Only two Klingons remained in the stable area. Brutus eyed them as they entered his loosebox. One edged near him, so he reared up and lashed out with his hooves. He came down and kicked out with his back hooves. Brutus also made good use of his teeth and nipped a nearby Klingon's arm. On one occasion, he managed to trap one against a wall, adding to his victim's discomfort by leaning his weight against the poor Klingon. Brutus continued to harass them. The crowd outside could hear various shouts and curses

and occasionally, a painful scream. The watching Klingons were sullen, while the rest could hardly contain their amusement. Brutus was giving the Klingons a hard time.

The time soon passed. Tricia returned. The two Klingons had not been able to complete their task. They emerged from the loosebox battered and dirty. One had a black eye forming, caused by Brutus lashing his tail around. Tricia entered; Brutus neighed his delight at seeing his mistress. She fussed him and soon calmed him down by grooming him, and he found it soothing. Fifteen minutes later, and Brutus was ready for his tack. Tricia put on the more elaborate tack she had prepared, than she had left for her opponents. She put a foot in her stirrups and was mounted. Pushing the door open, they walked out towards the waiting crowd. The two Klingons were now disgraced and left the area. Mr. Scott came forward.

"Well, lassie, you showed them, you crafty devil. I suppose this bonnie lad is one of your horses." He petted Brutus.

"Dead on, Scotty."

"I should have known by the way you were so sure of the outcome."

"See you later, Brutus is ready for off." The two disappeared down the passageway.

Much later, when Tricia returned to the ship, both Scotty and Tricia were called to Briefing room 4. They arrived together; Captain Kirk was waiting for them.

"Mr. Scott, Rider Yen. What is all this that I heard about bets and a challenge between yourself and a group of Klingons?"

"Well, Sir, it was like this. The two Klingons had seen Tricia training Enterprise Too. They began to insult her ways of handling the wee lassie, so Rider Yen challenged them. She had nothing to do with the bets. She used one of her own horses. The Klingons couldna' handle him. You should hae heard the sounds coming from his loosebox, never mind how the poor Klingons looked! Brutus didn't half give them a rough time."

"Rider Yen, I do not approve of your tactics, but, given the outcome, I suppose congratulations are in order."



COLOURS

LONELINESS.

Loneliness has no colours,
No hazel-coloured eyes,
No golden-coloured hair,
No wondrous-coloured smile.



LONELINESS.

Loneliness has no colours,
No silver-coloured lady,
No star-coloured sky,
No friendship-coloured dreams.



HAPPINESS.

Happiness is coloured,
Understanding-coloured eyes,
Tousled-coloured hair,
And a teasing-coloured smile.

HAPPINESS.

Happiness is coloured,
Sparkling-coloured lady,
Starlit-coloured sky,
And a golden-coloured friendship.



Maureen Frost



THANK YOU, SPOCK

Thank you.
No, don't say it, Spock.
I know thankyou's are not logical
To your Vulcan mind,
But to me they are important.
So, for just this once, please
Let me say it.
Thank you.
Thank you for being here...
And for being you.



Maureen Frost

BUT

Somehow the troubles we get in
Come so thick and fast,
Somehow it seems the end has come
And each breath may be our last,

But

Somehow the Captain finds the answer,
Though how I cannot tell;
Somehow he's plucked us once again
From the jaws of hell,

But

Somehow life aboard the Enterprise
Does not stay calm for long.
Somehow we may in a quieter moment
Think the life we chose was wrong,

But

Somehow deep down inside us
We know there could be no other way.
Somehow in spite of all the dangers,
On the Enterprise we would choose to stay.

Maureen Frost



MIND MELD



As I wait in anticipation
Your eyes look deep into mine.
The offer comes with shy hesitation
That is so strangely unlike you.

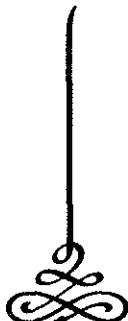
Would you like for us to meld?
My heart leaps as I let out the breath
I never knew I held,
And answer with my eyes.

Long cool fingers touch my face,
And as I reach out to do the same
My heart beats at a faster pace
As your mind reaches out to me.

We can say all that we feel,
Here within the meld,
And with love our friendship seal
Without the need of words.

Often in our minds we share
This place of calm and peace
Wherein we know we care
And our loneliness is banished.

Maureen Frost





offensive
unio

ME AND MY BIG FEET

by

Joyce Devlin

Why oh why does it always happen to me? Honestly, you'd think that being Chief Medical Officer of the Enterprise would count for something, but no. It shouldn't happen to a doctor, but nine times out of ten it does to me.

Well, take the time we rented a farmhouse for a shore leave. I'd only gone along on the condition that there was no shop talk and I didn't have to play nursemaid to Jim and Spock.

Everything was going just dandy until I answered the communications panel and came face to face with the principal of the local academy. As Jim was out I took the message for him - could he call into the school and give a talk to the sixth form on life in space?

I had only just closed down the link when it happened: the cat leaped from the top of a bookcase, claws out, right into my back. I can tell you I screamed like a scalded cat, especially as the lights went out at the same time. Being used to having lights on all the time on the ship, I'd forgotten to fill the meter with credits.

So, groping about in the dark, I managed to find the meter in the broom cupboard and popped in the credits. Voila! Instant light. *Jim*, I thought, *I'll kill you for this*.

I knew then that something else was bound to happen, and I wasn't wrong, for the unbelievable happened when Jim was away at the academy.

Spock and I were sitting watching the box when it started, almost inaudible at first, a sort of drip-drop noise. At first we put it down to the rain hitting the window pane, but it was too definite, too uniform in its continual drip-drop.

"That noise is driving me crazy," I said finally, getting up to investigate.

"Perhaps it's a tap," Spock offered.

"Yes, you could be right. You check the kitchen and I'll check the bathroom, okay?"

"Yes, and I'll put the kettle on," Spock said as he headed off in the direction of the kitchen.

I'd finished my search in the bathroom when Spock entered with two cups of steaming coffee.

"Anything?" he questioned.

"Nothing. You?"

"It was not the kitchen taps," Spock replied, handing me a mug.

We made our way into the living room once again to the buzzing of the communications panel. I crossed to it and switched on the viewer to reveal Jim's face.

"Well, you took your time," he said.

"Trying to find out what was dripping," I informed him lamely as a large cold drip landed on my head. I'd found it. My eyes raised to the ceiling.

"I'll be home in an hour, and I'm starving. Have some grub on, Bones," Jim was saying as another drip landed on my head.

"Okay. See you in an hour," I said and switched off the viewer.

"Spock, I've found it." I pointed to the ceiling, where there was a rather large wet patch showing as another drip came down.

"How do you get up into the loft?" Spock was asking.

"There must be a hatch somewhere," I replied as I tried to recall where I had seen it. "In the hall. I'll need steps to get up, and something to bind the leak till we can get a plumber in to fix it right, or we're going to be flooded out."

Spock's search produced a flashlight and a pair of wobbly steps. Unsteadily I climbed them - well, I did have more idea than a Vulcan what was needing done, and Jim would have a field day with me if anything happened to his pet Vulcan.

So - gingerly - I stepped on the joists, trying to keep my balance and at the same time find the leak, which wasn't easy as most of the joists were rotten. I could hear Spock telling me to hurry up, so I had to retort, "I'm a doctor, not a plumber," as I finally found the leak. "It's not easy bandaging a pipe, but I must say it's a lot easier than bandaging a non-co-operative Vulcan I could name, so shut up and let me get on with it."

As I stood up I took a step back to admire my handiwork, ignoring Spock's warning, and it happened. I stepped back onto the plasterboard and crash-bang through the ceiling I went, just as Jim came in through the living room door. I vaguely remember Spock's hand going out to grab me as I fell.

So there I was sitting on the floor with plaster all around me and Spock peering down through the hole in the ceiling at me.

Jim just looked as if he could not believe his eyes. "What the hell is going on, Bones?"

"Er... I was trying to fix a leak in the pipe."

"Spock, come down from there, and be careful - one big hole is enough without you making it two," Jim said.

I stood up, dusting myself down. "I'm a doctor, not a plumber," I repeated in self defence, glaring at Jim who looked as if he could beat a lion for roaring at that moment as he folded up with laughter.

"Then why..." *giggle giggle* "...didn't you call a plumber?" *giggle*. "There's one on call twenty-four hours a day..." *giggle*

"... for little emergencies like this." Jim caught his breath as another fit of the giggles escaped him. "I mean, Bones, a little bandage isn't going to fix that gaping hole, nor are any of your famous potions, so I guess I'm going to have to spend the next two days of my leave fixing that hole up there."

"There's no need for you to bother, Jim. I'm going to fix what I started," I said. "And Spock can help me."

"Oh no you're not, Mister. You're at the academy, you and Spock, for the next two days, taking to the students. I volunteered you, so there." With that settled, Jim looked like the cat who had got the cream.

Jim was true to his word. With Spock and me out of the way he had the hole in the ceiling fixed in no time and looking as good as new. For some reason I don't think I'm going to be allowed to live it down.

That's what I mean when I say it shouldn't happen to a doctor, but with Jim and Spock around it usually does. At least one thing, I'd no-one to patch up except myself. I'd gone fishing alone - well, I needed to get away from that walking computer Spock for a few hours. Spock's all right until he starts talking shop, and that's what he and Jim were doing, so I'd got up and gone out, feeling a little sorry for myself. I guess I wasn't concentrating, for instead of the hook catching a fish the damn thing caught my hand, so I ended up not catching anything except my own fingers. Nasty? Yes, very. The more I tried to free it with my left hand, the further in it dug.

I realised I was going to have to swallow my pride and get help, so I packed up and headed home, only to find no-one in, so there I was sitting in the kitchen, blood dripping onto the floor, trying to get the hook out. The more I prised the further still it dug into the palm of my hand.

I was never so glad to see Jim and Spock. Jim took one look at my hand and burst into a fit of giggles - it was clear he'd had a few beers. It was Spock who came to my aid, and in few painful moments he had me untangled from the hook.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Bones, but between you coming through the ceiling like something out of a Laurel and Hardy movie, and now this... Oh boy, this has been a real eye-opener!" he giggled.

"All right, Jim, calm down before you blow a fuse. Anyway, who are Laurel and Hardy?" I knew fine and well that they had been comic actors in the first half of the 20th century, and their old black and white movies are still classics today, but anyway it worked.

"You don't know who... Oh boy, you really have missed something, Bones."

See what I mean? No respect. Well, me and my big feet have dropped right in it again. What will happen next to yours truly I don't know, but life's never dull for your friendly family doctor, so until the next time, who knows what will happen? But something's sure to - and soon, if I know those two.



FRIENDS ARE A GIFT

by

Janifer Barnett

Spock was surprised by his first sight of the new Captain. He was of medium height and stocky, with hair of an indeterminate shade. However, the eyes sparkled and his face lit with a grin. That, coupled with a stray lock of hair which hung on his forehead, made 'the youngest Captain in Starfleet' look boyish.

"Permission to come aboard?"

"Permission granted. Welcome aboard, Captain. Science Officer Spock, in temporary command."

"My First Officer hasn't arrived yet?"

"No, sir. May I escort you to your quarters?"

"The bridge first, please."

In the turbolift Kirk cast a sidelong look at the Vulcan. 'You'll have to find your own way through that wall he builds around himself,' Pike had said at their meeting, 'but you'll find it well worth the effort.'

Kirk had an easy charm that drew most Humans to him, but he knew that this would not work with Vulcans - or even half Vulcans. Loyalty from this officer he would have - it was the Vulcan way - but respect he knew he would have to earn.

What about friendship? Command was a lonely business. Still, with Gary Mitchell, a friend from his Academy days, as his First Officer, it shouldn't be too grim.

Although Kirk was glad to have been able to offer the post to Mitchell, he had requested Spock originally; with the excellence of the Vulcan's record, and his years of service - fourteen on the Enterprise herself - Kirk felt he could do no less. However, Spock had refused, and Kirk was curious as to the reason.

Spock watched in fascination as Kirk met the bridge crew. A myriad of expressions flowed across the mobile features. The ease with which he drew people out... it was so different from the more introverted Pike.

Spock had admired and respected Pike, and he had found his formal style of command easy to deal with. Kirk obviously favoured a more relaxed style. Nevertheless, his record showed that whatever his methods he certainly knew how to command. However, Spock was pleased that he had refused the post of First Officer. He preferred to concentrate on his scientific duties, and now that he had met his new Captain he was somewhat relieved that he would not have to deal quite so closely with that ebullient personality. He found it disturbing - but could not determine why.

Spock raised his head as the sound of laughter echoed across the bridge - not an uncommon phenomenon since James Kirk had assumed command. Not that he wasn't all business when the situation demanded it. This time Helmsman Sulu was being teased about the possibility of falling victim to one of his carnivorous plants.

"But Captain," the oriental was grinning widely, "fencing is also one of my hobbies - I just keep a foil under my pillow."

"Touche." Kirk held up his hands in surrender.

Although Kirk's manner did not change when he dealt with Spock, the Vulcan felt at ease. He began to realise that it was because Kirk, perhaps even more than Pike, accepted him as he was and did not expect him to react as a Human. Even among Vulcans he had not felt such acceptance, but had always been subtly aware that they expected him to react in a Human way at any moment. Spock had gradually become aware that he too was being gently teased by his new Captain.

"Relax, Spock - it's the Human thing to do." This, accompanied by a conspiratorial wink, had indicated to the Vulcan that he too was being invited to share his Captain's lighter moods. Spock found within himself a most illogical desire to reciprocate.

"Spock, what are the chances of...?"

"I estimate the odds to be 20545.7 to 1, Captain."

He feared by Kirk's stunned expression that his first attempt to enter into the spirit of things had gone sadly awry, but as Kirk watched one eyebrow ascend he suddenly burst into delighted laughter.

"Spock, you... you poker face!" was the only reply he could gasp.

Kirk obviously expected certain standards of behaviour, but apart from that he treated each of his crew as individual beings. It was part of the gift of his ability to command. Intellectually Spock understood the Human term 'charisma', but never before had he been subjected to its effects. He found himself drawn to this man, and instead of avoiding him during off-duty hours he was inexplicably warmed when Kirk first invited him for a game of chess.

"Care for a somewhat different challenge, Mr. Spock?"

The Vulcan looked up from his just completed nightly game of chess against the computer. "Certainly, Captain."

Spock won their first game, although not without difficulty. It seemed Kirk's approach to chess was as unique as that towards command.

"Perhaps we can have a rematch sometime?"

There it was again, thought Spock, the subtle opening, but without pressure should he wish to refuse. "That would be most welcome."

Kirk won their rematch three days later. Spock blinked in surprise. Those last two moves had appeared almost totally without logic, but they had left Spock's strategy in a shambles. He hoped there would be many more opportunities to study Kirk's approach to chess.

Then Gary Mitchell was standing beside them. "Chess? Dull stuff, Jim. What about a workout in the gym?"

"Not now, thank you, Commander." Kirk was light but dismissive. "How about a cup of coffee, Spock? No, sit still, I'll get them."

Mitchell left and the conversation turned to the merits of three dimensional chess versus the old fashioned game. Kirk changed the subject easily.

"I've seen you work out in the gym a couple of times, Mr. Spock. Very impressive." Spock nodded slightly.

"I'd like to try out with you sometime - perhaps you could teach me some Vulcan techniques."

"As you wish, Captain."

Several days later, on the bridge, Gary Mitchell was telling one of his tall tales regarding his encounters with the female sex. Spock noted that the First Officer never indulged in that type of reminiscence when Uhura was on duty. The petite Communications Officer had quickly gained Spock's respect - and Mitchell's too, it seemed. Apparently Mitchell didn't feel any such constraint in Spock's presence.

"... she would melt a Vulcan on a cold night," Mitchell concluded.

"Damn you, Gary!" Kirk muttered under his breath. He frequently forgot that the Vulcan's sensitive hearing enabled him to hear his Captain's asides. Spock had not raised his head from the viewer, and was unaware that Kirk had swung the command chair around to face the science console.

"Mr. Spock, how about a gym workout after this shift?"

If Spock was startled by the abrupt invitation he didn't show it. "That would be most welcome, Captain."

Kirk sat contentedly in his command chair. It was a quiet shift. Even Spock was away from the bridge and somewhere in the science section. Time to savour his new command.

It was the calm before the storm.

Suddenly an emergency call from the science department crackled across the bridge. Spock and a young ensign had been trapped by an explosion in a lab.

"Sulu, take the con!" Kirk was into the turbolift before the words left his mouth.

Spock surfaced to the sounds of sickbay. A brief inventory told him that he had suffered no serious injury. He opened his eyes, and was surprised to see not only Dr. Piper's face, but that of Captain Kirk.

"Ensign Farrell?" Spock asked.

"She's fine, Spock," Kirk grinned. "Just winded and bruised from having a Vulcan land on top of her."

"My intention was merely to shield her from the worst of the blast."

"And as a result got yourself a fine concussion," chimed in Dr. Piper.

"I reasoned that my physiology gave me less chance of severe injury than did that of the Ensign."

"All right, Sir Galahad," teased Kirk.

Dr. Piper decided it was time to reclaim his sickbay. "Captain, now that you know that your Science Officer is conscious and functional, perhaps you will leave me to check out my patient in peace."

"Okay, Doc. See you later, Spock."

"How long have I been unconscious, Doctor?"

"About two hours."

"And how long has the Captain been here?"

"He was the first to reach you, and I haven't been able to get rid of him since," muttered the doctor as he started his examination of Spock.

It was illogical for the Captain to stay with an officer when he was in the competent hands of a physician. The only other person who had stayed with Spock was Amanda, but then all mothers, even Vulcan ones, did that when their children were ill.

"You check out okay, Spock, but I want you to stay here for 24 hours for observation."

"Very well, Doctor." Spock failed to notice the surprised look on Piper's face. He had tangled with the doctor before, and knew him to be a very determined man. He also knew that Piper felt somewhat inadequate with Spock's hybrid physiology, even though Spock had assured him that he was an unknown quantity even on Vulcan.

His thoughts strayed back to the Captain. He was puzzled by Kirk's vigil at his side. Perhaps this was what Humans meant by friendship. Of course, Spock himself would have waited to see if his Captain was seriously injured, but that was his duty - wasn't it?

Spock had observed with some puzzlement Kirk's relationship with Gary Mitchell. He realised that he did not know a great deal about the Human idea of friendship, but he began to wonder if on Kirk's

part it was more a habit of many years rather than a deep kinship. The two men seemed so opposite in many ways.

From Spock's point of view Kirk's message had seemed to say, *I would like to be your friend, but on your terms. I don't want to change you.*

Whereas Mitchell did not have Kirk's empathy, and often showed insensitivity. He made no attempt to understand why Spock could not react in the same way as he.

It had been a fairly routine planet survey; Kirk, as always, had insisted on leading the landing party, but even he had had to admit that he was somewhat superfluous on a scientific survey. He tried not to breathe down his Science Officer's neck, offering assistance to various groups in the survey, but was politely shunted to the next group. He attributed his growing headache to his feeling of being a fifth wheel, and even tried to pass off the brief spells of dizziness.

Spock, although apparently engrossed in his studies, had managed to observe his Captain and noted the increasing frequency with which Kirk brushed a hand across his forehead, and the growing pallor. Finally he approached Kirk.

"Captain, do you feel unwell?"

"Me? No, I'm fine, Spock. Can I do anything to help?"

At this point a bout of dizziness struck and Kirk swayed, but was saved from falling by a warm hand under his elbow.

"Perhaps you should sit down, Captain."

Feeling queasy from the dizziness, Kirk did not argue. With his head down he was not aware of Spock's surreptitious use of his tricorder. His findings were disturbing, and to Kirk's annoyance Spock summoned Dr. Piper.

By the time the doctor had completed his examination Kirk was in no condition to argue with Piper's urgent call for beamup and a medical team standing by. The immunity gained by his brush with Vegan Choriomeningitis in earlier days had left Kirk, and only Kirk, vulnerable to the rare virus that had chosen that moment to make its presence felt.

Kirk's condition deteriorated rapidly. Piper worked feverishly, stabilising vital signs and identifying the virus. Once, viruses had been considered untreatable, even by the original wonder drug, penicillan; however, over the centuries some viruses had been conquered by the drugs that had followed the various antibiotics, although to the chagrin of the medical profession the common cold was a holdout. Although resistant, this particular virus had been treated successfully in the past.

Nevertheless, it was virulent, and Kirk hovered close to death for 24 hours before Piper finally had the right balance of medication to kill the virus without damaging his patient.

While Kirk hovered on the brink Piper became increasingly aware of the amount of time Spock spent in sickbay. If it had not been the

Vulcan the doctor would have accused him of loitering.

With Piper's care and his own robust constitution, Kirk bounced back, and was soon chafing at the bonds of his convalescence.

On issuing the summons, Spock was surprised to see Kirk enter his quarters for the first time.

"Piper has ordered two weeks medical leave for me. His recommendation, and my inclination, have agreed on a camping trip. I was wondering if you would accompany me?"

That was Spock's second surprise - not that Kirk had not asked him previously to join him on shore leave. Spock had refused consistently. For the most part Kirk and Mitchell had taken their shore leaves together, and usually headed for the bright lights of a city.

Refusal almost on his lips, Spock realised that Kirk had an uncharacteristically anxious look, as though he wanted Spock to agree but did not want to pressure him. On impulse, Spock accepted.

They set up their camp some way from a small river as the ground had been too marshy closer by. Looking at their food supply, Kirk said,

"I don't know about you, Spock, but I get tired of this reconstituted stuff."

"Indeed, Captain, it does lack something."

Kirk grinned and produced a compact fishing rod from his kit. "Which is why I brought this."

"While you are endangering piscine life forms I shall be determining what vegetation is suitable for consumption."

"To each his own, Spock," Kirk replied, allowing his growing affection to warm his voice.

Returning to their campsite with his catch in hand, Kirk halted a few feet away to observe his Science Officer, who seemed to have attracted several of the forest's wild denizens to his side. The farm boy in Kirk knew that the wild creatures did not trust easily; their lives depended on caution at all times, especially in areas where they were often disturbed by humanoids.

Nevertheless, there was Spock sitting by their tent hand feeding two squirrel-like creatures, while several multi-coloured birds hopped nearby.

Apparently having decided that the squirrels had had their share Spock placed some crumbs in his palm and held out his right hand. At the same time he was making quiet sounds, which Kirk could not quite distinguish as words. Kirk had always believed that under the austere facade was a gentle and sensitive being, and he watched, fascinated, as this side of Spock was revealed to him.

"If you approach with caution, Captain, I do not believe that the creatures will be startled."

Kirk edged towards Spock and slowly sat down beside him. The squirrels and birds eyed him warily but continued to feed from Spock's hand.

The first two days of their leave passed peacefully, each finding contentment in the other's company. Evenings were spent by the fireside in quiet conversation.

In spite of his camaraderie Kirk was essentially a private man, and as such he did not inquire into Spock's family background, although he was obviously interested in Vulcan ethology. He listened in quiet fascination to Spock's stories of the great Surak.

"You understand the principle of IDIC far better than most Humans I have met, Captain."

Kirk looked a little surprised, then said, "Thank you, Spock - that's quite a compliment."

The eyebrow rose. "It is a fact, Captain."

Kirk smiled quietly and began to tell Spock a little of his own background, his life on an Iowa farm, and his burning desire to follow his father into Starfleet.

The fire had burned down. "Sorry, Spock - I don't know what got me started like that."

"The isolation of command must be very difficult for Humans."

Kirk looked across at the shadowed face. "You understand us more than you let on."

"It is part of what I am, Captain, although the Vulcan half does predominate. But I was referring to the fact that you obviously enjoy the company of your fellow beings, but as Captain you must still keep yourself apart. That must be difficult for you."

Kirk sighed. "Yes, in some ways it is, but I have found it easy to talk to you."

It was Spock's turn to look surprised - most Humans seemed uncomfortable with his precise and formal speech.

As they prepared for sleep Spock was thinking over the evening's conversation and realising that an empathy was materialising between them in spite of the great difference in personalities. Spock understood that he, like the rest of the Enterprise crew, was drawn to the warmth of their Captain, but he could find little in himself that should make Kirk wish to deepen their budding friendship.

Kirk also mulled over the evening's chat. He liked the Vulcan's quiet dignity and gentle strength, he marvelled at the complex brain, and basked in the feeling that once he had gained this unique being's friendship it would never be withdrawn.

Kirk also checked in with the ship in the evening. Partway through the second day Mitchell called.

"Jim, the Enterprise has been ordered to rendezvous with a medical supply ship that has engine problems. They want us to transport some perishable vaccine that was bound for Taurus IV."

"Does Piper have any concerns about storing the vaccine?"

"I'll let you speak to him, Jim."

Piper was adamant that Kirk continue to enjoy his recuperation and that he not be left alone.

"Okay, Gary, Spock and I will stay here. You have my ship - take care of her."

"Sure thing, Jim. Sure you're not going to get bored?"

"We're fine here. Check with me as soon as you are back in range."

"Aye aye, sir."

By the third day Kirk was a little restless, and suggested a day's hike towards some nearby mountains. They walked in a companionable silence most of the way, Spock as always showing insatiable curiosity about the life forms around them. At one point he became so totally absorbed that he almost failed to notice Kirk standing watching him with an amused expression.

"My apologies, Captain. I did not intend to delay, but these plants are most fascinating."

"It's all right, Spock. We're on leave, after all. What's so interesting about these particular plants?"

"They seem to have several medicinal properties, much like many of the herbs from your Earth. Dr. Piper would find them most interesting - if you don't mind, I should like to collect some samples for him."

"By all means. Tell me what you want and I'll give you a hand."

Once Spock felt that he had sufficient samples they continued their hike.

As the forest began to thin out a little Kirk touched Spock's arm lightly, and having gained his attention pointed to a meadow area to their right, where two large, cat-like predators were stalking their prey. With signals, Kirk indicated that he would stay put if Spock wished to get a little closer.

As he watched the Vulcan's stealthy advance a slight movement to his left alerted Kirk to the presence of a third predator. In a flash Kirk realised that the cat had turned its attention from its original prey to the two-legged kind.

Making as much noise as possible Kirk rushed at the animal, cursing his lack of a weapon, and succeeded in diverting its attention from Spock and towards himself. The cat spun to attack Kirk with lightning speed. Knowing he would not have a chance of outrunning the animal, and realising that the noise had attracted the Vulcan's attention, Kirk could do little else but try to protect his

face and head from the initial attack. He was braced against a tree, which forced the animal to rear up. With Spock but seconds behind the cat's upright stance facilitated the Vulcan's use of the neckpinch. Kirk was nevertheless clawed on his arms and upper body.

During his lucid moments Kirk was amazed at the gentle way Spock tended his wounds and all his other needs. He was aware that although Spock was only half Vulcan he had inherited that race's superior strength. Even though it was Kirk's nature to chafe at any illness, there was something very reassuring in submitting to this tender care.

Spock found himself totally unable to resist the temptation to brush aside the stray lock of hair that always adorned Kirk's forehead. It was an illogical reaction, he knew, and had nothing to do with his self-imposed nursing duties. Or... did it?

Hazel eyes observed him, and Kirk managed a slight grin. "Sorry to be such a nuisance, my friend."

With a start Spock realised that never in his life had he been addressed that way, even though Vulcans - despite the suppression of emotion - valued friendship highly.

Kirk was holding out his hand now, and without hesitation Spock took it in both of his.

Spock realised that he needed time to think. Kirk had received his injuries saving him. Surely a cry of warning would have been all that was needed? Instead the Human had rushed in and taken the brunt of the animal's attack. Now those wounds, although not serious initially, had become infected.

A further enigma was why Kirk found it necessary to lead most landing parties personally. Spock, as Science Officer, was obviously needed for exploration, and as he was of command rank he was also the obvious leader. Surely Kirk realised his disinterest in command did not extend to such routine instances, but merely to command as a profession?

Using his earlier observations of the local vegetation Spock had been able to make a poultice whose medicinal properties should draw the infection from Kirk's injuries. After little more than 24 hours Kirk's fever was gone, and he soon became impatient to return to their camp. This Spock finally permitted - in easy stages.

"It's the last time I leave you two alone together," grumbled Piper as he sat sharing a drink with Kirk.

"C'mon, Doc." The Captain was feeling quite mellow. "These things just happen sometimes."

"You mean you let that Vulcan get his nose so deep in something he didn't have enough sense to come up for air."

Kirk opened his mouth, but Piper continued relentlessly, "Then you have to dive in head first when he gets into trouble."

"Hi, Spock." Kirk sat beside his Science Officer, who was consuming his usual sparse meal in the rec room.

"Captain." Spock found pleasure in the fact that Kirk sought him out more and more on such occasions.

Kirk's meal, although substantial when compared to Spock's, did not include the usual desert but did have more than the usual amount of salad foods. Spock cocked an eyebrow, and Kirk grinned ruefully.

"Piper says I've regained more than enough weight and with R&R coming up I thought I'd better do something about it."

"Indeed - it would be a pity if you were unable to enjoy your shore leave in the normal way."

Kirk wasn't sure how to take the last remark. "On the subject of shore leave, Spock - have you made arrangements for yours yet?"

"I had not planned on leaving the ship, Captain."

"Well, I can't insist you go as long as your performance isn't below par. Don't you ever take any shore leave?"

"Rarely, Captain, but if I did so I would choose to be away from the populated areas."

Spock had grown accustomed to Kirk's curiosity, which never seemed offensive. If he realised that he had stepped beyond a person's boundaries Kirk retreated quickly and gracefully.

"Would you consider a shore leave of that type if you had company, Spock?"

"You, Captain?"

"Yes, if I promise not to tackle any wild animals this time, that is."

Kirk grinned, and there was an answering twinkle in the deep brown eyes.

On one of their explorations they came upon a troupe of anthropoidal creatures which apparently lived in a cave partway up a loosely shaled slope. Signalling their agreement for a closer approach they went in opposite directions to lessen the chance of attracting attention.

Kirk became so intent on the creatures that he stumbled, and immediately became the focus of the troupe's attention. En masse they rushed him, but whether with the intent to injure or merely to scare him was not too clear.

Instead of calling out a warning Spock found himself rushing headlong into the fray in emulation of his Captain's earlier actions.

In the aftermath Spock caught Kirk grinning at him, and he cocked an inquiring eyebrow.

"Whatever happened to 'It would have been more logical to shout a warning'?"

Spock realised that he had not even considered that course of action, so anxious had he been to save Kirk from further injury.

As the animals raced back up the slope Spock and Kirk stood below to watch their progress. A deep rumble gave scant warning that an entire section of the slope had given way. Spock pushed Kirk to one side, only to be engulfed by the loose rocks and sandy soil.

Spock's shove had been forceful, and Kirk's breath was knocked out of him. The seconds seemed like minutes before he regained his feet and could begin to dig frantically towards the body of the Vulcan, to which - Kirk fervently hoped - the one leg he could see was still attached.

When Kirk finally managed to drag Spock out of harm's way he thought for one horrified moment that the Vulcan was no longer breathing. A closer look revealed the shallow rise and fall of Spock's chest. After some fumbling he found a pulse also. He was panicked for a moment by its speed until he remembered some of the physical differences between Humans and Vulcans. Grunting at the unexpected weight of the slender body, Kirk managed to lift Spock across his shoulders and head towards their nearby campsite.

When Spock finally surfaced to consciousness he beheld a pair of worried eyes.

"Jim?" It was the first time he had called his Captain by name.

"How do you feel, Spock?"

He tried to answer, but the dryness of his mouth made it almost impossible.

Instantly understanding the problem Kirk said, "Hold on - I'll get you something to drink. Don't move."

Spock found the final admonition easy to comply with - his body seemed unwilling to obey his wishes.

Then Kirk was back, an arm slid under Spock's neck and shoulders, and in a few moments he found himself comfortably held and a cup of water held to his lips.

"Can't you two ever go planetside without one of you coming back with injuries?" grumbled Piper.

"We do seem to be setting a pattern," agreed the Vulcan.

"Well, at least with two of us there one can always be dragging the other one out of trouble," Kirk added. "Besides, Spock got hurt shoving me out of the way."

"Yes, and if I remember correctly you got yourself mauled distracting that animal away from Spock," Piper retorted. "In other words, you're each as bad as the other."

This final remark succeeded in quelling the two officers, who tried to look dignified but managed only to look rather sheepish.

"In some ways I'm glad I'm not going to be around to keep patching you two up," was Piper's final remark.

Their first shift coincided with new orders from Starfleet. They were to attempt to pass out of the Milky Way galaxy to where, it was believed, no man had gone before.

Gary Mitchell was dead. Kirk felt so empty. Not only had he been the cause of the man's death, but with Gary gone who did he have to call friend?

Now that Piper was retiring he had been able to request Dr. McCoy as his CMO. He had known Bones on and off for some time, and he liked the gruff exterior that hid a heart that could feel for any soul. Kirk felt that with constant association their friendship would deepen, but still, as a doctor, McCoy would not talk the same language as someone familiar with command.

Spock had turned down the post of First Officer when Kirk had first been assigned to the Enterprise because he did not wish for command, and preferred his scientific duties.

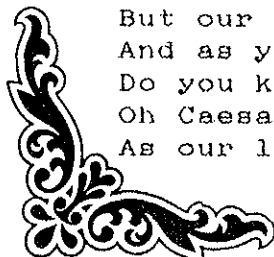
Spock... That was it! Suddenly Kirk realised how badly he needed that calm presence by his side. But how to persuade him...?

A slightly devilish grin dawned. He knew Spock was often horrified by his apparently precipitant command decisions. If he could convince the Vulcan that as First Officer he would have a better opportunity of staying some of those leaps of illogic...



CAESAR OF THE STARS

Oh Caesar of the Stars, be mine
 As our lives, our pasts entwine.
 For us there can be no tomorrow -
 Oh Caesar, are you aware of my sorrow?
 My love for you grows with each meeting,
 But our encounter can only be fleeting.
 And as you pause to take a breath,
 Do you know of your impending death?
 Oh Caesar of the Stars, be mine
 As our lives, our pasts entwine.



Christine Maybank

THE NAME OF THE GAME

by

Elaine Sheard

The U.S.S. Enterprise was going about her business mapping a new sector of space. The crew, after a hard mission along the Klingon border, was not too unhappy with this routine task. There was even talk in the lower reaches of security, always a hotbed of rumour, that their next assignment was to be in Quadrant 4, the home of Wrigley's pleasure planet. So it was with some anticipation that contact was made with Starfleet Command.

However, their orders were not as expected. They were instructed to speak to Admiral Reaton of the diplomatic department.

Captain Kirk answered the Admiral somewhat warily. He had a dislike of diplomatic missions and his First Officer, as a member of a diplomatic family, had presumably joined Starfleet to avoid such work, though he had never actually said so.

Admiral Reaton seemed somewhat ill at ease, but when courtesies had been exchanged went on in a firm voice, "Captain Kirk, you are to discontinue your present assignment and make your way with all dispatch to the planet Hilvan, in Quadrant 8."

"May I know why, Admiral?"

"Yes, of course. You are to contact Ambassador Truel, from the planet Maelstrom, who is waiting for your call. You know of Maelstrom, Captain?"

The Captain turned to his First Officer and asked. "Well, Spock?"

He answered at once. "Maelstrom's the only inhabited planet on the far side of the maelstrom cloud. It was discovered by the U.S.S. Brandon when the ship was pulled off course by the effects of this cloud. Class M, population at last census, 20,443,021, became a member of the Federation 14.36 years ago."

Admiral Reaton was somewhat taken aback by this, but recovered quickly. "Yes, well that was so until about three months ago, when the planet was devastated by a blight. The Federation scientists had trouble finding the cause, but have now succeeded. Unfortunately, the only cure is a rare compound now being manufactured on Hilvan. There is also a time-factor; if the compound is not spread on the planet within six weeks the blight will be irreversible. The planet and all its inhabitants will die due to atmospheric contamination."

Captain Kirk sounded grim as he replied. "Sir, it takes ten weeks at warp 8 to get from Hilvan to Maelstrom, circling as we must the maelstrom cloud. There is no way the compound can get there in time."

"So we understand, but the Maelstrom Ambassador has come up with a possible solution, one to which the Federation Council has reluctantly agreed; but there are problems."

"Indeed, and how does that affect us, Admiral?"

"The Ambassador has made a private arrangement with someone who claims to have made a trip through the middle of the maelstrom cloud, taking only three weeks. Your ship is the only one in the area big enough to carry the compound needed to counteract the plague. If this person really has the necessary knowledge, you may reach the planet in time."

Captain Kirk did not like what he was hearing or the careful way it was being said. He asked firmly, "Admiral, you could have ordered me to do this. Why so circumspect?"

The Admiral seemed to find it hard to answer a direct question. "I would like to tell you that our Statistical Department estimates the chances of your making this trip without any help are 100 to 1. If you have the proposed help, but do not have the services of your First Officer, they are 25 to 1. If both are with you the odds are improved to 10 to 1."

Captain Kirk was getting annoyed. "Admiral, what are you trying to say, and why would Mr. Spock not be with us?"

"The person we are talking about is a Calamor Military Adviser."

That was enough for Captain Kirk. He said angrily, "Military adviser my eye. They're mercenaries, they'll work for anyone, even Klingons."

Spock said quite calmly. "Actually Military Adviser ~~is~~ the more correct term - they never actually fight. They do however give advice, usually of a military nature, for financial gain."

The Captain spoke coldly. "That rat-hole of a planet of theirs attracts every criminal from a dozen solar systems."

Spock, still interested in accuracy, said, "Yet the planet itself is said to have almost no crime."

"That's because their so-called justice is swift and violent. You must have heard of what happens to anyone who harms one of their military advisers?"

Spock's voice was dry. "Yes, Sir, they obviously believe in an old-fashioned type of justice. The Admiral is of course aware that the Vulcan Council has forbidden their nationals to have any association with Calamor Military Advisers."

The Admiral's answer was almost suave. "This ruling has been somewhat modified."

Mr. Spock was equally suave. "Indeed? Perhaps I could be informed of these modifications."

"I will let you have the details later, but essentially it leaves the choice of contact, if any, up to the individual."

Captain Kirk asked, "You mean they have withdrawn their objections to such contact?"

The Admiral sounded apologetic. "Not exactly. If the Council considers their nationals' judgement to be at fault they will take legal sanctions against them."

Captain Kirk was angry. "That's monstrous, and you know it."

The Admiral was firm. "I'm sorry, Captain, but that's the best we could do. If such contact saves over 20 million lives I'm sure the Vulcans will not complain. They just don't want to set a precedent."

Spock intervened, saying thoughtfully, "That is quite understandable. I shall read the details of this modification with interest. If it is as you say I have no objections to meeting this individual and seeing if I agree with the Statistical Division's assessment of his expertise."

So it was that two days later a rather chastened crew and a seething Captain arrived at the planet Hilvan. Arrangements had been made to meet the Maelstrom Ambassador in a lawyer's office. The Captain was accompanied by Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy and his chief security officer, Mr. Landon. The ambassador was a small, rather plump man, with an anxious manner. With him was the lawyer apparently representing the Military Adviser, who was not present.

Captain Kirk had read the modification of the Vulcan ruling, and had been heard to mutter savagely about lawyers to any of his crew unfortunate, or unlucky, enough to come in contact with their angry Captain, so he looked with disfavour on this one. After introductions had been made he asked tartly, "Where is this intrepid adviser we've been hearing about?"

The lawyer answered smoothly. "Mr. Brown was on sick leave when this situation arose. I have to complete the financial arrangements first."

"That's got nothing to do with Starfleet."

"Of course not. These have now been completed. Mr. Brown's injuries have in no way impaired his mental capacity and he will pilot the ship only in an emergency."

"There is no way this person is getting anywhere near the controls of my ship."

The Ambassador interrupted, almost in anguish. "Please, gentlemen, you can argue the details later. Just agree to meet Mr. Brown and find out if he can help. He's working for me; all I ask is that you listen to him."

Spock said, "I am interested to see the evidence of Mr. Brown's trip through the maelstrom cloud. Perhaps we should accede to the Ambassador's request, Captain."

"Very well, Mr. Spock, if you think that best."

So the lawyer asked the Adviser to come in. These men wore uniforms in unrelieved black, so the Enterprise men knew what to expect, though they were in for some surprises. The man who entered was humanoid, and with dark brown hair, brown eyes and medium build was in no way remarkable were it not for the fact that he wore a sling, had a limp and that his face was badly battered and bruised.

Dr. McCoy couldn't help saying, "It looks like someone doesn't like the advice he gives. I've never seen such clear evidence of disapproval. I think I'd better see a medical report to see if he can steer himself across a room, never mind across half the galaxy."

The Ambassador said worriedly, "I'm sure that will be acceptable."

Mr. Brown's reply was calm, even amused. "By all means Ambassador. I believe Lawyer Samson has such a report and also a record of my trip through the maelstrom cloud - at least, the first week of it. I understand Commander Spock has some interest."

The reply was quite expressionless. "That would be most helpful. Perhaps Lawyer Samson would allow me to use his computer terminal to enable me to make an initial examination."

The lawyer merely nodded and gave a tape to Spock and one to the Doctor. This done, he led Spock over to his computer.

Dr. McCoy examined his tape in the medical scanner, then said, "Nasty, very nasty, but nothing really serious apart from the arm. I think I had better have a look at it right now."

The lawyer seemed doubtful, but Mr. Brown was more accommodating. "By all means, if you think it necessary."

Dr. McCoy began removing the dressing while saying in a rough voice, though his hands were gentle, "I'd like to meet the person who had the spunk to do this to you."

The reply was non-committal. "That's not likely, Doctor. My employer took a very dim view of the matter. Believe me, the two who didn't survive the encounter were the lucky ones."

"I suppose you approve of that?"

"My approval or otherwise didn't come into the matter."

The doctor made no further comment, but finished removing the bandage. There exposed was a long knife wound running from wrist to elbow. With the exception of Spock, all present could not resist a quick look, though on seeing the extent of the injury they looked away, somewhat embarrassed. The doctor asked a few questions and then re-covered the arm, saying as he did so. "It must be painful. Are you taking the prescribed medication?"

"I am indeed. I am not one of your stoic Starfleet types."

"No, I never thought you were."

Spock ignored this medical exchange and addressed his Captain. "I find the Statistical Department was essentially correct, though I would like to verify some points with Mr. Brown."

Captain Kirk asked bluntly, "Are you coming with us, Spock? I don't like the position you've been put into and will understand if you consider this impossible."

The reply was firm. "I do not intend to let legal complications interfere with my duty as First Officer of the Enterprise. Mr. Brown seems to have the knowledge which could make the difference between success and failure. Any personal distaste in the association must be disregarded."

"You are right of course. It will be good to have you with us, Spock, and I am grateful for that."

"Unnecessary, Jim."

With this Spock went and spoke to Mr. Brown. "There are some points I would like to clarify in your report."

"Very well, Commander," was the even reply.

Captain Kirk listened to this exchange and though he understood very little of the ensuing conversation, he did recognise Spock's tone of voice as one he might use when speaking to the computer. The replies were equally impersonal. A working relationship was obviously being established. Ten minutes later they rejoined the others. After a nod from Spock, Captain Kirk addressed the Ambassador.

"The reports are satisfactory. My ship and my Science Officer are therefore at your disposal."

The Ambassador replied with visible relief. "Thank you for that, Captain, Commander. The compound will be ready for loading in 48 hours, and that done we can leave as soon as you are ready."

"You are coming with us, Ambassador?"

"I am, Captain. I trust you have no objection?"

"No, Sir, in your position I would want to do the same." He then turned to Mr. Brown. "We have accepted your services because of the seriousness of the situation. However, while on my ship you will be accompanied by an armed guard at all times, and you will treat my officers with the respect due to their rank."

The reply was bland. "Of course, Captain, though I have a request. I am probably more familiar with the operational standard of your ship than you would like, but it may still be necessary for me to know the actual detail of performance. I have here a list of the information I consider essential. Perhaps your First Officer would like to examine it and give his opinion?"

With this he handed a list to Mr. Spock, who, after a quick look, said, "I can see the necessity for some of these questions, but not all."

Captain Kirk's reply was firm. "I leave it up to you Spock. I'm sure you'll keep the security position in mind."

"I will indeed," was the dry reply.

So after taking their leave of the lawyer the whole party went to the Enterprise. The Ambassador was given a cabin in the V.I.P. accomodation while Mr. Brown was allotted one on the security corridor. It was here next day that Dr. McCoy came to see him. He had arrived at lunch time and watched Mr. Brown slowly eating his meal with one hand before saying.

"I understand you to say you didn't want any help, but how are you managing to wash and dress with that arm?"

The other man's eyes were amused as he answered. "Slowly and carefully. Wouldn't you?"

"Very funny. Well, my head orderly, Ritch, has offered to help you."

"There's no need for that, Doctor. I don't want to upset any of your staff."

"You won't. Mr. Ritch has worked both in Federation prisons and mental institutions, so I think he can cope."

"I'm not sure if that's meant as an insult or a compliment Doctor, but either way I accept the offer with gratitude."

Next day, Mr. Brown was taken on a somewhat restricted tour of the Enterprise by the First Officer. This ended on the bridge, where Captain Kirk asked,

"Well, Spock, did you give Mr. Brown the information we agreed upon?"

"I did, Sir, though there were one or two omissions which seemed to trouble him."

Captain Kirk then addressed the Military Adviser. "I gather there is some information about my ship which you think you still require."

The reply was bland. "Not the ship, Captain, but rather the performance of your crew." He ignored the mutterings of the younger members of the bridge complement and went on. "I quite appreciate your restraint, but have a suggestion to make. I can obtain a training tape which highlights the skills required. If you would agree to run it I think my questions could be answered without any unauthorised disclosures."

"What do you think Spock?"

"The idea has merit, sir. I could edit the results if any security regulations are breached."

So Mr. Brown was allowed to return to Hilvan to get the training tape while the Enterprise made plans to begin the exercise. He walked down the corridor of the Hilvan Space Centre, glad to be free of the security guard. Though his arm was still painful, his broken ribs and bruised legs were much improved and he walked with only a slight limp.

Suddenly he thought he heard something, but he was not fast enough to reach the safety doors before they slammed shut. He heard the pumps began to remove the atmosphere from the now enclosed length of corridor. Before he could become light headed he lay down on the floor and removed several objects hidden in his sling. First a small knife, which he put up the sleeve of his good arm, then a portable oxygen pack, the tube of which he attached to his nose. He then arranged himself with his face half turned towards the wall so his mask couldn't be seen, and waited.

In his work gauging time was important so he was almost sure that six minutes had passed before anything happened. More than enough time to think about who would be so foolish as to attack a Calamor military adviser. He hoped they would be angry or desperate enough to ensure his death in person. There was the sound of the returning atmosphere, then of the oxygen doors being opened. Footsteps could be heard slow and deliberate, though the breathing was harsh and fast. The footsteps stopped. A peep through

half-closed eyelids showed Starfleet boots and trousers. Yet one look at the face and a sight of a non-regulation phaser set to kill was enough. As soon as a hand stretched down to turn him over Brown struck. He allowed the knife to slip into his hand and then plunged it upwards hard and fast, getting to his knees as he did so. One man getting up and one bending down met with a crunch of knife and bone. Both fell back with a cry, the one in Starfleet uniform with a knife in the middle of his chest, and the other holding his already injured arm as white-hot pain shot through it. Then there was the sound of running footsteps and a group of men burst round a corner and came upon the two now supine forms

A voice said hoarsely. "My God, it's Mr. Landon and that ---- mercenary has killed him."

Another voice answered. "No, the Lieutenant's still alive and so is the other one."

Mr. Brown felt his fortunately good arm being grabbed and he was pulled roughly to his feet. He managed to stay upright but was unable to speak. Standing in front of him was Mr. Lynch, the deputy Security Officer of the Enterprise, looking both angry and menacing, yet when spoke his voice was low. "You need not pretend you're hurt. You will stand against the wall with your hands raised or I'll use a phaser on you, and the least you'll wake up with is a nasty headache."

Mr. Brown tried to answer, but before he could do so the Ensign pushed his injured arm up with his phaser. As the arm came out of its sling the blood which had accumulated in the corner spilt out, running first down the Ensign's phaser, then his arm, and finally his uniform. Mr. Brown watched all this, then he gave an apologetic shrug and fell in a dead faint on the floor.

When he regained consciousness it was not the awakening he was trained for, but a slow awareness, the effect of a heavily drugged sleep. He knew before he opened his eyes that he was on a space ship. He looked round; not the brig but sickbay, and no security restraints either. He then looked quickly at his arm, numb, probably from a nerve block, but still there. He raised his eyes from this self-inspection to find Dr. McCoy looking at him, not without sympathy. The doctor said,

"Don't worry, I managed to get both sides of the wound together again, though it was rather a mess. In a way you were fortunate." With this he put two semi-transparent fragments on the bed looking rather smug as he did so.

Mr. Brown asked. "What are they Doctor?"

"These are pieces which must have broken from the weapon which inflicted your injury. They are almost undetectable, but I managed to find them in the wound. Your surgeon must have missed them."

"You seem to have done a good job, but are you suggesting I should be grateful to your security chief?"

The doctor looked slightly uncomfortable. "We are now aware that it was Lt. Landon who arranged the atmospheric emergency; he didn't have a chance to cover his tracks."

The other man was ironic. "I hope you explained that to his assistant, a man of strong loyalties I think."

"Yes indeed. The Captain would like a word with you about that if you feel up to it."

"I wouldn't miss it for the world," was the reply.

Captain Kirk didn't actually apologise, but he did manage to be quite civil as he explained. "Lt. Landon's family was killed on Alaser by a group who had the advice of one of your colleagues. I understand the sight of your uniform proved too much for him. The information wasn't in his record, but the doctor brought it to light."

"Where is the Lieutenant now, Captain?"

"You don't expect me to answer that, do you? We are now on our way to Maelstrom and by the time you can report to your headquarters he'll be almost impossible to find."

"I saw his eyes just for a few seconds Captain. I can recognise insanity when I see it."

"I have nothing more to say on the subject. I have spoken to Ensign Lynch on the matter of jumping to conclusions and as far as I am concerned the matter is closed."

"I concur, Captain. I appear to have benefitted in the medical area and you have become aware of the mental instability of one of your crew."

When Mr. Brown was fit enough to go to the bridge he was met by complete silence on recent events. The injuries to his face had nearly disappeared and it was revealed to be as unremarkable as the rest of him, though no doubt it was not the one he had been born with. He too was all business, asking the First Officer, "Since we are now only two days from the edge of the maelstrom cloud I don't suppose there will be time for the training exercises?"

The reply was bland. "We took the liberty of using your tape while you were incapacitated. It proved an most interesting experience."

Mr. Brown did not hide his amusement. "Quite an unusual scenario wasn't it, yet it broke no natural laws."

"We are aware of that, and though the ship would have survived the experience we would have taken 26.34 years to reach Federation space, unless repairs could have been made to our warp engines."

"A slow recovery, I take it. I look forward to reviewing the tape if that is possible."

"I have the tape for you. I think you will find the crew's performance satisfactory."

"I have no doubt that I shall, Commander."

The first thing noticeable about the maelstrom cloud was its colour. The many hued gasses and liquid metals ebbed and flowed in a roughly circular mass 2000 light years across. To go through this successfully one had to by-pass the corrosive and super-heated elements. The readings Mr. Brown had obtained on his trip were fed into the computer, but as the elements were moving at different speeds and it was two years since the earlier trip, constant

vigilance had to be exercised. The computer predicted the forward conditions as best it could and Mr. Spock made final recommendations to the Captain. Twice during the first week of the trip he found this impossible and the Captain had reluctantly to acknowledge Mr. Brown's greater experience and follow his advice. This had so far proved correct.

The ship then entered a cooler area which it was agreed could be crossed safely at warp four. Mr. Spock and the Military Adviser had hardly left the bridge and rest was deemed advisable for both of them. First, however, Captain Kirk wanted a conference in the briefing room. He turned immediately to Mr. Spock.

"I am not happy with the way things are going, Spock."

"We have got this far without incident, Captain."

"On the contrary, we have had two command decisions made by this person, and I don't like it one little bit."

"Understandable, but he is the better qualified. In both incidents neither I nor the computer had enough information to make a recommendation, but Mr. Brown did."

"You are suggesting that we allow a mercenary to make the decisions on a Federation Starship."

"Make the decisions and even implement them. The tapes from Mr. Brown's trip show that the final 72 hours before we leave the maelstrom cloud are such that there may well not be time to transfer orders to the helmsman."

"In that case you will have to feed the information direct from the computer to the helmsman."

"We could, but that will not be enough. In my opinion only with Mr. Brown in direct control of the ship will the odds of a successful passage be acceptable."

The Captain's voice was ominously quiet as he asked, "How long have you held this opinion, Commander?"

"I acquired the final tape only 24 hours before entering the maelstrom cloud, sir. The full significance of the contents only became clear as a result of the problems of the last week."

The Captain now turned to the Military Adviser. "You must have been aware that this situation would arise; why didn't you say something?"

"You wouldn't have taken my word for it. I hoped that you would have accepted your First Officer's judgement more readily."

"There must be another way, Spock. Surely you could do this?"

"Not as well as Mr. Brown."

"You should try not to take this so personally, Captain. The expertise I acquired as a mercenary is going to save lives; we should be grateful for that. Even a Starfleet Officer can't always say as much. You're a military organisation - whatever your motives people have died because of your actions. I get my reward in money, you in glory and even the Vulcan in a unique chance for scientific study."

"We've all got our reasons for being here, so let's try and work together and do some good for once."

"It does seem logical, Captain."

"Very well, I know when I'm outmanoeuvred. You could even be right, so let's get on with it."

Things went somewhat smoother after that. The last week of the trip was still not easy, but finally they were through the maelstrom cloud and could again see the stars. There in the distance was a solar system whose one inhabitable planet was Maelstrom, just one day's journey away. Soon the effects of the cloud were left behind and contact could be established with the planet.

"This is the U.S.S. Enterprise calling Maelstrom Space Centre. Ambassador Truel would like to speak to the head of the Hilvan council, Mr. Lightral."

"Ambassador, are you aware of the emergency conditions here?"

"I am, and we have with us on the Enterprise enough compound to kill the spores before they take complete control of the atmosphere."

"I don't know how you did it, but you're more welcome than I can say. I'll put you in touch with Councillor Lightral right away."

Things moved quickly after that. Arrangements had to be made for both people and animals to stay inside for 24 hours while the compound was active, but this done the spreading of the agent took only 30 minutes worldwide. The spores died quickly and arrangements could then be made to remove the affected vegetation and plant new stock, which was already on its way by the longer route. The atmosphere contamination began to clear almost immediately, so breathing was already easier and work could commence almost at once. The crew of the Enterprise gave what help they could and all were kept very busy. The Maelstrom government, however, did find time to honour the senior officers of the Enterprise some two weeks after their arrival.

While returning from this reception Captain Kirk, wearing a newly awarded decoration, spied a familiar face.

"Why, Mr. Brown what are you doing here? I thought the Maelstrom authorities wanted you to keep a low profile?"

"They have, for a small additional payment, retained my services, Captain. I pointed out to them that they could utilise my expertise to train pilots to guide ships through the maelstrom cloud. They should have no difficulty getting a loan from the Federation Council for this purpose. As I told them, if they don't no doubt somebody else will."

"I suppose you'd have made sure of that, wouldn't you?"

"Not necessarily, but I felt it my duty to mention the possibility."

"How very noble of you."

"Of course; now come on, Captain, you know they're so hidebound they never do anything unless they're given a push."

"Perhaps, but they've had enough pushing in the last few months to last a long time."

"It hasn't cured them of their bad habits. It's taken me all my time to get them to even consider any but the upper-classes for the job, and as for the women, you'd think they were a race apart."

"So for this 'small additional payment' you are supporting the under-privileged rights on Maelstrom, are you?"

"I'm not pretending it's the reason I'm here, but I'm not averse to putting their case. After all, I couldn't do less than the Federation's done in the last 5 years, could I?"

"These things take time, but it will come, if only by example."

"Nonsense. I've heard that kind of argument before - it's just an excuse for doing nothing. Though come to think of it, Starfleet hasn't such a good record in this field itself."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Ask your First Officer."

"It is true, Captain, that there is a 32% less chance of a Starfleet cadet achieving command rank if she is female."

"But they leave for personal reasons, to have a family and such."

"Don't you think they'd do both if they had the chance?"

"I don't know, and neither do you."

"True, but it's something to think about."

"How is it that every time we meet we end up arguing?"

"I don't know, Captain; perhaps it's because you have a sort of innocence which I can't resist. Even Mr. Spock only hopes for the best. I think he really expects the worst from us most of the time."

"I'm a Starfleet Officer, for goodness sake."

"That probably explains it. The real world is somewhat less grand. I once had a wife and family, and believe me that's real responsibility. Chance swept them away, and I'm not saying a Starship wouldn't have come in useful at the time. So there you are - we all have our weaknesses."

"You're saying that being what you are is only a weakness."

"No, I'm not saying that, only that we can only make the best of what we've got and not be so ready to judge others."

With that they parted, the Enterprise went on to her next assignment and Maelstrom got her space corps, which she ran at quite a profit. Captain Kirk proved partly right, for once travel became easier for the Maelstrom population it was only a matter of time before they began to change their social attitudes. So perhaps every one gained a little in the end.

As for Mr. Spock and the Vulcan Council, with Starfleet

permission he sent a detailed report of his contact with the Military Adviser. He received in return a two word reply.

"Contact approved."

As Captain Kirk said, "The trouble with these Vulcans is they either say too little or too much."

Mr. Spock considered the doctor's amusement at this in rather bad taste and told him so at some length.



VULCAN GARDEN

In a Vulcan garden
Grows a flower of alien beauty,
Transplanted from its Earthly home
To this land of logic and duty.

In a Vulcan garden,
In a climate far from mild,
The flower learned to thrive,
As did her Vulcan child.

In a Vulcan garden
Where evening breezes play,
She watched him grow to manhood
And choose the Vulcan way.

In a Vulcan garden
She stood to say goodbye;
Though Vulcan he would be
He chose the stars to fly.

In a Vulcan garden
Stands a lonely mother...
But if her life she could live again
She still would choose no other.



Maureen Frost

WAKING ALONE

Waking alone, after years, is still lonely -
 no-one to lie at your side;
 and the old ache returns, the desire for some comfort,
 a balm for the years that have died.
 The dreams that you left on the floor are all broken -
 she crushed them and threw them away -
 and the daughter has flown, and so far from your calling,
 your life dries like old used-up clay.

A life where, surrounded by burdens,
 the day lies heavy and long;
 to cradle the cares of all others
 you can't afford not to be strong.

Christine might care - were it not for another -
 unhappiness turns her to you.
 One more lost hope, and your shoulder to cry on -
 what more can you offer to do?
 And what of the man whose home lies far from Terra,
 who chooses untouchable creeds?
 You well know his pain, yet you must keep your distance,
 and give him the freedom he needs.

A freedom, not yours for embracing
 and trapped with the silence of years -
 for how can you weep for yourself
 when you have to dry all others' tears?

The Captain would care - but he has so much caring -
 his shoulders are only so wide,
 and he needs someone strong, someone there to rely on
 to carry the tears that aren't cried.
 They all seem surprised should your smile ever falter -
 infallible they see you stand -
 though they know deep inside that you're still only Human
 their love slips through your fingers like sand.

A love, like your love for your brothers,
 that frames the rule by which you live -
 for how can you see the world hurting
 and not offer this gift you can give?

With no-one to touch - yet the irony of it
 is the love that they'd willingly show
 should you ever say 'Help me' - but still, they all need you
 and you cannot allow them to know.
 They all are your friends, and you know that they love you -
 you could claim them each for your own,
 but for now you must be what they need for their yearning:
 irascible, strong - and alone.
 You stand with them - and still stand alone.



Gillian Hovell

WHAT GOES UP MUST COME DOWN

by

Julie Thomson

Very few people were left admiring the exhibits at the Aviation Centre exhibition. It was nearly closing time, and except for the few who were visiting at the last minute, Kirk and Spock were able to take their time browsing. That is, if you could browse with your head more or less permanently turned skywards.

Instead of the mere models that old-style exhibitions used to have, most of the objects on view were working models or vehicles still permanently in use.

As always in places like this, there were samples of all the known aliens in the U.F.P. milling about. At this hour, it was mostly people who were involved with some type of aviation who were left, people who did not want to be bothered with kids and their sweet papers, or the crushing of crowds.

Kirk's expression was that of a young boy let loose in a toy factory. "They're beautiful, aren't they, Spock?" he said, his eyes slightly glazed. "Sometimes I wish I lived in one of those times, when going up there," he nodded his head skywards, "was still an adventure. Those must have been exciting days." He sighed.

Spock's eyebrows rose in their usual fashion. "You do not find modern times exciting?"

His companion grinned at him. "Oh, I suppose so, but wouldn't you have liked to be the first one to fly? To be the first one to see everything from up there?"

Spock considered the question. "We have discovered many things first, as you put it; we have also been to many planets first. No, when I consider it, I think my life is too well fulfilled to regret anything."

His friend stopped and looked at him. "You are trying to tell me that you have no romance in you, aren't you? Well, my friend, you don't fool me."

"I assure you, Jim..."

But Kirk wasn't listening to him. He had spotted something that had truly run away with his imagination. A balloon. A hot air balloon. It floated there, pulling at its mooring rope as though impatient to get free, its orange and yellow stripes a blaze of colour.

Kirk walked towards it slowly. "You know, Spock, I've always wanted to go up in one of those things. I remember when I was a kid..."

But Spock wasn't listening. Unbeknown to Kirk he had become distracted himself by some other artefact in the opposite direction, and while he was studying it a group of his own race had approached

him to talk.

Meanwhile, one of three children who had been capering about the balloon had got into the basket to investigate how the balloon flew. They did not know that the owner of the balloon was getting ready to fly off shortly; he had loosely secured the ropes while he went off on some errand or other.

As Kirk had been enjoying looking at the balloon it took him a few moments before he realised that the children had somehow worked the ropes loose and that the balloon was now rising off the ground with a little boy in it.

Kirk raced towards it, shouting as he went. "Hey! You! Get out of there!"

Unfortunately the child, partly in fear, partly in surprise, was rooted to the spot. Just as Kirk managed to grab the child the basket rose too far for him to haul him out. As it gained height Kirk managed to scramble over the lip of the basket and into... safety? He looked over the side and saw the ground retreating away from him; also Spock.

"Spock!"

The Vulcan looked up in surprise, then Kirk's communicator bleeped. "Captain, may I ask what you are doing up there?"

The expression on Kirk's face was one of incredulity; he had completely forgotten about the communicator. *Hell, now I've just told everybody where I am.* Sarcastically he replied, "I'm counting clouds, what do you think I'm doing?"

"Captain, I would not think..."

"Forget it, Spock. Do you think you can do anything?"

"Jim, I presumed that since you are in the basket you knew how to fly it, but as you evidently don't, I would suggest you come down."

"SPOCK!" came a very exasperated voice. "I wouldn't be asking for help if I knew how it worked, would I?"

"Just stay where you are." An evil glint came into the Vulcan's eye. "And I shall endeavour to contact Mr. Scott to beam you up."

He heard an angry yell at the other end. "Spock, I'm not likely to be moving from here, and don't you dare call Scotty. Besides, there's a boy here with me, and I couldn't leave this... this thing to carry on by itself."

"Really, Captain, where is your romance now? Do I take it you have lost interest in the balloon? I would have thought..."

The communicator went dead as Kirk shut it at the other end.

After gazing over the side - which he could just about see over if he stood on tiptoe - the boy had stood to watch the frantic man who was his unexpected companion.

As Kirk closed his communicator he heard the boy mutter in awe, "Gee, aren't you a Starship Captain?"

Kirk turned to smile at him. "Yes, son," he answered, and then more to himself, "and I wouldn't be in this mess if it wasn't for you."

"What's that, sir?" the boy asked.

"Oh, nothing. What's your name?" He studied the boy. He was, he supposed, the average height for about a seven-year-old, with the brightest red hair Kirk had ever seen, freckles, glasses - and an obnoxious runny nose, across which he now and again drew his sleeve.

"Carrots, sir." Then he hung his head and muttered, "But my mom calls me Wilbur."

Kirk bit his lip as he tried not to laugh; he wasn't sure which name he cared for less. "Well, young man, I'm Captain James T. Kirk. Jim, to my friends, and since we're going to be together for a while, you can call me Jim."

Wilbur/Carrots looked up and smiled.

"And since we are going to be here for a while, I suggest we enjoy it," Kirk said as he put an arm round the boy's shoulders.

They watched the ground below change from the green countryside to the browns and steel colour of the city, then back to countryside again.

Carrots suddenly realised something. "Sir? Jim? Why can't you take this down?"

Kirk gave him a slow grin. "I'll let you into a secret, son. I do know how to get this balloon down. I've read so much about them, but never had a trip in one... so here we are."

"All right!!!" exclaimed the boy, and turned back to enjoy the view.

The boy gave exclamations of joy as Kirk pointed out the various landmarks. Eventually the starship captain turned his eyes towards the sky. Besides his lady, this was about the best way to travel, very little machinery being involved. Silent travel. To feel the breeze ruffle his hair or cool his cheeks, and just for the moment not to think of duty. He was a free spirit. For a few minutes he was able to forget that he had someone in the basket with him, but he was rudely interrupted by the beeping of his communicator - again.

"Yes?" he answered.

"Captain, are you all right?"

Kirk shook himself mentally and brought himself back to the here and now. "Of course I am, Spock. Where have you been?"

"I went to find the owner of your abductor. Really, sir, I would have thought you would be back by now," Spock added.

"Does the owner want it back *there*?"

"Preferably, sir. I will relay his instructions to you..."

"Don't bother, Spock. We'll be back shortly... say, twenty minutes. Yes, that should be long enough, and it won't be dark." Kirk snapped his communicator shut with glee. *That should shut him up for a while. Smart-ass Vulcan.* He turned to his young friend. "Well, kid, I guess that's it. Home we go."

He grinned as he reached for the cord to change their direction. Unfortunately for all concerned, it snapped. Kirk looked at the piece of rope left in his hand, his mouth open in surprise. "Oh lord," he muttered.

"Jim?" came Wilbur's voice.

"It's all right, son. We'll get back. Just give me a second."

Kirk jumped to make a grab for the remaining rope but only managed to shake the basket violently on landing. He looked over the side to get his bearings, and heard a ping, followed by another peculiar noise. Then suddenly the balloon lurched and started to fall.

Kirk grabbed the boy's shoulders. "What did you do just now?"

Wilbur held up a catapult gleefully. "The rope's broken, ain't it? We can't get down, can we? So-o-o..."

Meanwhile the balloon was still drifting down, hissing all the while, its gas escaping quickly. Kirk's face wore an astounded expression, but he pulled himself together and prepared for a crash landing by hanging onto the sides, instructing the boy to do the same.

"Do you know what we're above?" he shouted over the noise.

"No, but ain't this great?" Wilbur shouted back with a grin.

If Kirk had had the nerve to open his eyes he'd have raised them to the sky, but he didn't want to see his life flash before him, so he kept them firmly shut. He felt the air rushing past him as the balloon carried on its path downwards, then it dragged as it caught itself in one of the taller trees. It finally came to rest and he opened his eyes, unfortunately not before Wilbur, who was now rushing to have a look over the side. The next moment Kirk found himself hanging on for dear life - upside down.

"Wilbur! Where the hell are you?" he shouted.

"I'm here below you."

Kirk managed to see him, but since he was hanging upside down the boy looked as though he was sitting on the branch above, also upside down. The boy began climbing about, which made Kirk more concerned, but Wilbur was laughing as he capered about.

Suddenly Kirk heard the beep of his communicator. He let go with one hand and felt at his belt, but it wasn't there. Where was it? He looked around. There it was on the ground; no way was he going to reach it.

"Damn!"

After a while the incessant beeping stopped. He sighed. Ten to one that was Spock wondering why he hadn't spotted the balloon yet.

He took a look around him, not making much sense of the world as he saw it from his position. His legs had become trapped in the ropes, which clung on to a very tall tree; he would have to do something about it, or else all this hanging about would make him ill when he eventually became upright. He could see the ripped and tattered material of the balloon lower down (or was it higher up?) in the next tree. Well, that was the end of that. He tried to work out if he had enough credits in his account to cover the damage.

"Hey, aren't we a long way up?" Wilbur's voice interrupted his thoughts.

"Yeah, but don't you move about so much or else you'll have this basket falling down."

Kirk tried to swing his body up to touch the bottom of the basket, but found his movements only made the tree shake violently. He was also apprehensive about the boy, although Wilbur hardly looked frightened - to him it was just one big adventure. Kirk calculated he was about thirty feet up from the ground, a long way for a seven year old to fall. He felt no pain anywhere in his body, just the feeling that he was going to be sick if he didn't get upright soon.

The branch above him, on which the basket was caught, began to tremble. "Wilbur, what are you up to now?" Kirk shouted frantically.

"I see your legs are caught, Jim. I'm just going to have a go at freeing them."

"WHAT THE HELL WITH?"

"I've got a penknife," Wilbur replied.

No! No, don't do that..."

Too late. The boy had managed to free one of his legs. Lord Almighty, now he was swinging by one leg.

"Captain, are you by any chance thinking of resigning?" came a voice from below.

"Spock!"

"Yes. Captain?"

"Get me down from here!"

"Certainly, sir." Spock looked up at the boy. "If you would cut the rope restraining the other leg, it would be most appreciated."

As the Vulcan spoke Kirk felt a slight lurch, then he was falling... falling to land with a thud on his rear end.

The tree had been shaking, and now it gave up its prisoner, the basket, which proceeded to follow Kirk, landing on the prone figure below, covering him like a box.

Kirk had closed his eyes when he had heard Spock's command to the boy, but now he opened them to semi-darkness.

"Spock!" he shouted frantically from within, "There's something wrong with my eyes."

"Permit me, sir," the Vulcan said as he removed the guilty object, and light came back into Kirk's world.

The rumpled starship captain glowered furiously at his First Officer. "Spock, you could have got me killed."

The Vulcan raised an eyebrow consideringly. "Hardly your death, sir. A broken leg or arm, but never your death."

"A... a broken... Spock, words fail me!"

"A phenomenon I have never encountered before... sir."

Kirk cautiously moved his limbs and felt no pain. Extending a hand to Spock, he was pulled up. "Where's Wilbur?" he asked as he brushed himself down.

"Wilbur? Ah yes, the small boy. I believe if you look up, sir, your question will be answered."

Kirk looked up and saw Wilbur swinging from the branch he had just been sitting on. "But... but I wasn't as high up as I thought I was," he remarked in surprise.

"No, sir," replied Spock smugly. "Your senses must have been slightly deranged. Captain, anyone can make a mistake."

Kirk looked back at him with disbelieving eyes, then with as much dignity as he could he asked, "How did you know where to find me?"

"The Enterprise helped."

"The Enterprise helped?"

"Yes, Captain. I would appreciate it, Jim, if you didn't repeat everything I say."

Not really wanting to know how the ship had helped, Kirk changed the subject. "Spock, why did you ask if I was resigning?"

"I noticed you have quite a flair for acrobatics, although I would have thought swinging by one leg was a little dangerous."

Kirk was hard pressed not to retaliate, and might have replied with something appropriate, had not a transporter sparkle appeared a few feet from them. McCoy appeared and hurried towards them, his medical bag in his hand.

"I got here as soon as possible. I..." His words failed as he saw Kirk, and his expression changed from worry to puzzlement. "I thought you had been injured. Uhura said you had been kidnapped and that your vehicle had crashed..."

His words died away entirely as he saw the basket lying a few feet away from them. Looking from Kirk to Spock then back again, he frowned. "Would someone please explain to me why I'm rushing about after a supposedly injured captain?"

The Vulcan cocked an eyebrow at his captain.

"Bones, I thought you'd be pleased to find I'm unhurt," Kirk ventured to reply. "But if you must know, I was kidnapped and taken off in that balloon. Due to unforeseen circumstances it blew away and crashed here, the kidnapper ran off, and..."

His words were interrupted by a shouted, "Hey, Jim! You should see the view from up here! It's nearly as good as from the balloon."

Kirk had completely forgotten about Wilbur. Trust him to put his nickel's worth in now.

McCoy had looked up in surprise when he heard the young voice; now he smugly crossed his arms and raised an eyebrow in a fair imitation of Spock. "Well, Jim?"

"Yes, well..." Kirk, embarrassed, started to explain. "It was really like this..." He carried on to recount all that had happened. By the time he got to, "The balloon landed, balancing on a branch, but due to Wilbur it capsized and I was left hanging upside down," McCoy could hardly contain his laughter, and by the end of the story he was leaning on the aforesaid tree, shaking with mirth, tears streaming down his cheeks. The Vulcan didn't look too solemn either, much to Kirk's fury.

"I was in mortal danger, Bones. It's not exactly something to laugh at!" Kirk said indignantly.

McCoy wiped the tears from his face with the back of his hand, then looked up at Wilbur. "Hey, son, are you coming down?" he asked.

"Yes, I suppose so," the boy replied reluctantly. He climbed down and landed on his feet.

McCoy asked, "How would you like a tour of a starship, young man? Um... that is, if the Captain allows it."

Kirk nodded somewhat reluctantly.

"Okay, but I haven't to be too long. My mom will be wondering where I am."

Spock explained, "I took the liberty of informing your mother of your whereabouts. She will be..."

"WILBUR!" A loud shrieking voice came towards them.

The boy scurried behind Kirk, muttering, "My mom."

A large lady, slightly out of breath, came up to Kirk. Looking him up and down she said, "I know my Wilbur is here..." Then, spotting her son she continued, "Please come out from behind the gentleman, Wilbur."

As the boy complied she grabbed him by the ear. "What do you mean by causing these gentlemen all this bother? I can't leave you for two minutes. Just wait till I get you home..."

Kirk coughed. "Ma'am, we've just invited him for a tour of the Enterprise."

She stopped her ministrations and interrupted him. "And just what is this Enterprise?"

"The Enterprise is a starship, ma'am," Kirk answered, "and we are a small part of her crew."

"One of you spoke to me earlier on," she said.

"I did," Spock said.

"Yes, you look trustworthy, but who was the man who got my Wilbur into more trouble?"

Kirk coloured and answered, "I did." Then, seeing the fury flush her features, he held up his hands defensively and hurriedly continued, "I didn't mean to - it was an accident."

Wilbur's mother looked at him with disdain written all over her face, then switched her gaze to Spock. "I hope I can prevail upon you, Mr....?"

"Spock, madam."

"Mr. Spock, to keep my Wilbur and this... um... gentleman out of trouble."

"You can rely on me, madam," the Vulcan answered her.

Seeking atonement, Kirk asked the woman if she would like to accompany her son. She declined, saying that she would prefer to keep her feet firmly on the ground.

"And I don't want him to be too long, he must be home for tea."

McCoy answered, "Just as soon as he's seen everything, we'll send him home." He put an arm around the boy's shoulders, ready to leave.

The woman took a comb out of her bag and began to tidy Wilbur's hair, saying at the same time, "You behave yourself, young man."

"Aw, mom," he answered, pushing her fussing hand away.

"Well, you're only a boy, but this man should know better." She gestured towards Kirk.

Kirk, by now feeling younger than Wilbur, was in a hurry to get back to his ship and sanity. The four stood ready to beam up, and on Kirk's order they sparkled out of existence, leaving Wilbur's mother to make her way back to her hired air car.

When they materialised on the ship McCoy elected to come with them to the bridge, the first place Wilbur wanted to visit. The boy gasped an "Oh!" as the turbolift doors opened to reveal the crew busy at their stations. Chekov was in the centre seat, and rose quickly as the Captain entered.

"Thank you, Chekov. Anything to report?"

"No, sir, everything is quiet."

As Chekov resumed his normal seat Kirk turned in his and grinned at Wilbur, who was standing behind him. "How would you like to see a couple of manoeuvres?"

"I'd love it!" the boy exclaimed joyfully.

Kirk turned back, smiling. "Impulse power, Sulu."

As the powerful engines gathered speed he heard whispering behind him, then McCoy and Uhura were laughing. He swung round to find out what was causing all the hilarity, but Spock was the only one sober enough to answer his questioning look.

"Wilbur has just made the observation, sir, that it is fortunate his mother does not know that you are the one in command of the Enterprise when you are incapable of handling a balloon."

Kirk opened his mouth in surprise, then, seeing the funny side of it himself, he too joined in the laughter.



RECOGNITION

"You're suffering from a Vulcan mind-meld, Doctor."

Strange, this unconscious knowing -
strange how

I understand you

I love you

more than I did before.

. You always knew

We always knew

: that the teasing was born of affection -
but how could I ever know
that deep in your heart, it could hurt?
It was not meant to hurt!

: that you were never just the third
of two - I valued, needed you
as much as I did him -
just - *differently*, and not so plain of showing.

We cannot talk
yet all the time, I am aware
of what you think, and feel...

No, we cannot talk
aware

no hiding now, my friend - perhaps
this is the only way
you could believe?

And recognising you at last,
I am ashamed
for all your pain.



Gillian Hovell

THE MAN'S RETURN TO HIS BELOVED

The Man speaks:-

This little craft is bearing me
to grief or joy today -
I can't believe she'll spurn me now
and quench this kindling ray.
I threw the empty years away
and tried to ease the pain
with shutting out these memories
that still were bright and plain.

I lived within an emptiness
a hollow in my mind,
for when I took myself away
I left my soul behind.
What have I waiting still to lose
more than this love I lost?
God grant this ship's command to me
and I'll not count the cost.

You called me - I came gladly in
that strength that holds me bound -
I pledge all friendships to your trust
all loves that I have found.
Will she... will she remember me
who loved her more than all,
who, in despite of leaving her
has always felt her call?

If she should change, and not take me
I might as well turn old -
if this love, like all others, dies,
the world would grow too cold.
Oh take me to your heart again,
for I cannot be free
until your arms have opened, and
embraced and cherished me.

You called me, and that fatal call
could never be denied.
I had to answer, had to come,
though all the world had died.
The thread by which you draw is strong,
the tune you sing is wild -
a woman with her hair aflame,
a burning, wayward child.

A glowing, silver ghost you rise
a phoenix from the night,
and my soul's edge is honed again
and moves within your light.
My joy unmans me - clinging here
it takes my voice away -
Oh I will give ten years of life
for seeing this today.

So fragile and so beautiful,
 so patient - still and strong -
 God grant a reason to remain,
 to stay where I belong!
 Oh Lady, you are life to me,
 my mother, lover, child.
 Here is my life again for you,
 my heart, whole, undefiled.

You call me with your gentle voice
 you pull me with your thread
 and deep in you my own blood flows
 with that of friends long dead.
 Oh you are mine and mine alone,
 and always, I am yours -
 Forgive me, Lady, that I left -
 it seemed, then, I had cause.

Though your face may have changed its smile,
 that smile's still there for me.
 You spread the wings I do not have -
 together we are free.
 Oh give me stars and untold suns,
 give me the endless skies
 of blue-black velvet, diamond-showered,
 the only worthy prize!

And there she stands, so beautiful,
 the love of brighter years -
 serenely, she has brought me here,
 but cannot stay these tears.
 There is no sight like this for me,
 of seeing her as one,
 her radiance more than innocence,
 her light bright, as the sun.

Begone, begone my feet of clay,
 for here's where I belong -
 Too many years I lost below,
 but here, my youth is strong.
 Those years, dead years, all fall away,
 my heart again is young;
 again I hear her sing to me
 the song she's always sung.

My God, this gift is better far
 than others you could give,
 for this one brings my soul to me
 and gives me cause to live.
 I offer up a sacrifice
 of that which you think due
 to my White Lady, great my queen,
 its choice I leave to you.

Oh Lady, Goddess, Lover Mine -
 I lie here in your hand;
 my happiness is all with you,
 my fate at your command.

His Beloved replies:-



You left me lonely and bereaved -
 your sacrifice I claim-
 the life of him you most adore,
 a portion of your pain.
 And if you still prove true to me
 the gods might hear my plea
 and take a different sacrifice -
For friendship's sake, take me.
 Oh you are mine, and we are one,
 and thus through death we came,
 and if you love me you will have
 your heart's desire in flame.
 Yes, if you love me, you will have
 your skies writ with my name.

Gillian Hovell



LENORE'S LAMENT

On the observation deck you stood,
 So self-assured in your manhood;
 But as you held me in your arms
 I was impervious to your charms;
 For like another member of your crew,
 Of my father's past you knew,
 And it was I who cast a spell
 To ensnare you in my private hell.

All remaining witnesses have to go,
 So that we can start the show.
 As I clear my father of his sins
 The curtain rises and the play begins.
 Only you now stand in my way,
 But you won't live to see another day.
 Your crew look on aghast
 To see me take aim and fire with phaser blast.

The deed is done, I hear him cry.
 Please, Father, this is no time to say goodbye.
 Come now, get up from the floor -
 Go enact the parts which you adore.
 Father, why do you not hear
 The adulation of the audience dear?
 Hark, can't you hear them sing
 Their praises for the Conscience of the King!



Christine Maybank

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

by

Brenda Kelsey

He sat very still, trying not to fidget. He was nervous, elated, and scared to death, but he was determined that none of that would show. He thought that it wouldn't go down too well, him being a nuisance too. The skinny guy who was waiting to beam up too hadn't sat still for more than five seconds since the failure had occurred. Despite his control he shivered when he thought of how close he had been to disappearing in a cloud of unrelated atoms.

"Damned transporters!!"

Oh no. He's starting off again.

"Scattering your atoms about the universe isn't right. Stands to reason that the thing would go wrong." (Pause.) "Again."

He maintained a discreet silence, unwilling to be drawn into an argument with this unknown hyper-active companion. After all, the blue-eyed stranger could be anyone; and it would be a totally rotten start to any assignment to fall foul of a senior officer before you'd actually boarded the ship. He wished that the other man hadn't been wearing civilian clothes too. At least he'd have some idea of the man's rank. He bit his lip, forcing back the smile as the irony of the situation wormed its way up into his funny bone again.

Sorry I'm late joining the ship, sir. I got held up by a transporter failure???

He looked at the ceiling, the floor, his nails, praying to all the gods of engineers everywhere not to let the man start up again. The gods turned a deaf ear.

"Stupid way to travel. Why Jim won't send a shuttle down to collect us I just don't know. Hanging around down here. Sheer waste of time."

As the man walked over to the base personnel to harangue them again he heaved a sigh of relief. He'd been absolutely correct in keeping his mouth shut. The man had said 'Jim', and could only have been referring to the captain of the Enterprise. He definitely was a senior officer. If only the crew could get the transporter working. Whatever happened it was going to be deadly embarrassing when he finally got on board the Enterprise. He just wanted to get it over with. He sat and stared at the floor.

Finally a pair of boots appeared in his circle of vision. He looked up them, and the legs and body of the owner, until he reached a face bearing an expression of suppressed fury. He smiled at the girl. She didn't smile back.

"Are you for Enterprise?" The question was curt.

"Yes."

"I'm sure that you'll be delighted to know that they've finally got themselves sorted out and they're waiting for you to beam up."

"Thank you."

Nonchalantly, ignoring the fuming base transporter crew who'd had to suffer the vocal whinging along with him, he picked up his travel bag and joined the man who was already waiting on the transporter pad. He was grumbling when they dematerialised and carried on without pause after they had safely appeared on board the Enterprise, the flow of insults now aimed at the engineer handling the controls.

"Och, stop yer whittering, Bones. Just be thankful that you got here safely."

"Safely!!! Do you realise how close I came to being scattered by that infernal machine?"

"Yes, I know. But it didna' happen and you are here in one piece, all safe and sound."

"HA! It wouldn't surprise me at all if that benighted thing didn't go out again just to get a little more attention."

"It's a collection of circuits, not a hypochondriac."

Even as he spoke the transporter console indicated a malfunction and the engineer turned swiftly to it, flicking the power cut-off and safety devices.

"See what I mean, Scotty?" taunted the new arrival.

He drew a deep breath and held it, waiting by the steps of the transporter pad, totally ignored by the two across the room. Open warfare was only avoided by the timely interruption of the ship's intercom.

"Bridge to transporter room."

"Transporter room. Scott here, Captain."

"The bridge indicators say that it's blown again. Did we lose anyone?" The voice was anxious.

"No. Our favourite witch doctor was already on board." Scott registered the stranger waiting patiently by the pad for the first time. "As is the new crewmember we were warned to expect."

"Ah, he has got here. Didn't think that he'd make it, deadlines were too tight. Close down the transporter and lock those controls off. I'm not going to run any more risks with that machine until the console has been completely rebuilt. We'll have plenty of time before our next planetfall."

"Aye, sir."

"Bones?"

"Yes, Jim?"

"No comments." The order was stern, and brought a swift appreciative smile to the newcomer's face.

"Now Jim, would I?"

"Yes," interrupted the captain's voice. "You would. Leave it, and THAT'S an order. I know you don't like the transporter, and I know that it's been more broken than whole recently, but Scotty and everybody else knows it too. They do not need you 'reminding' them. Not a word. Is that understood?"

"Aye aye, sir!"

"Good. Scotty, as you're down there, process the new crewman, will you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thanks. We're leaving orbit now. No point in hanging around any longer. The Station Manager is threatening to charge us with loitering. Kirk out."

He continued to stand watching the two he now knew to be Lieutenant-Commander Scott and Doctor McCoy. They were still squared up against each other. It was the doctor who finally broke the silence.

"Perhaps when you've finished with the new man you'll point him in the direction of sickbay so that I can do my part in the processing."

Not waiting for an answer he stalked out, his spine still stiff with unvented anger. Scott blew out a breath and switched on an apologetic smile.

"Welcome aboard. I'm Montgomery Scott, Chief Engineer."

His cautious reply of, "Thank you, sir. It's nice to have arrived," brought a twinkle to the other's eye.

"It isnae always sae bad. You just managed to catch yon doctor with his least favourite piece of machinery biting his ankle. He'll calm down."

"I'm glad to hear that." His reply was a trifle too fervent, creating a distance between himself and the officer. He straightened. "Reporting aboard, sir."

"You brought your joining orders with you, I understand." The question was formal, as the procedure was slightly unusual. Enterprise hadn't been informed who they were getting, only that they were getting someone.

"Yes, sir." He handed the squares of plastic containing his career record and current orders over.

"What's your name?"

"John Kyle, sir."

"Your rank and speciality?"

"I'm the new Transporter Chief. Sir."

Scott looked at him in blank disbelief for perhaps 15 seconds, then exploded into the fruitiest laugh that Kyle had ever heard.

Kyle scratched an ear then helplessly joined in with his senior officer. It took quite a few minutes for them to calm down sufficiently for either to talk.

"Laddie, you have a wonderful knack for timing. I'll see that your things get tae your quarters, but first I'm going to take ye down to sickbay and watch while McCoy runs the physicals on ye. It's going tae be a grand sight, him wanting tae badmouth transporters and no' being able tae lay intae ye. Then ye can start tae rebuild yon console."

"Aye aye, sir." He patted the machine as he passed it. "You stay right there, baby. Daddy'll be back real soon."



WHEN

When I was a child
I dreamed of the stars, and my mind wandered,
Leaving Earth far behind
My silver spaceship quickly took me
Into vast realms unknown
To go and seek wonder.

Now that I can actually touch the stars
And the silver ship is indeed mine,
I long to go back to the peace of childhood.

Little did I know
That wherever man goes the only wonders he can see
Are the mirrors of his soul,
And tears and joy, laughter and pain,
Are the silent companions
Of wonders.

My wife died -
Stones her own people hurled at her
Broke her skin and set her spirit free.

But Miramane is still by my side,
For she has taught me
That the greatest of all wonders
Is love.

And love is eternal.

Elizabeth





IN QUIET MOMENTS

by

Sharon Hylar.

Kirk turned to his friend and studied the lean figure busy at the science station of the bridge. Quiet moments like this were great for turning his always-questing mind inward. Those were the times when there was no enemy to intrude upon his consciousness, leaving him free to contemplate... *The Friendship*. So unique, so rare... offered to him by someone equally unique, equally rare. Someone who saw James T. Kirk as he was, who wasn't always trying to make him over into what they thought he should or could be, but accepted Jim for himself, right or wrong. He'd never quite figured out just what it was that had drawn Spock into the friendship, just what the Vulcan saw in him that compelled him to offer friendship again and again. Maybe he never would know... but in quiet moments like this it was somehow a pleasing thing to contemplate that the friendship he felt for Spock was reciprocated, that the emotional support was there whether Spock chose to admit it or not. Kirk revelled in the security of the feelings roiling up within him during these periods of self-search. He never came up with concrete answers, but he *did* find some interesting reflections.

Spock straightened, feeling eyes on him, and turned to find Kirk, the only other person on the bridge at this hour - between shifts - studying him contemplatively. Peacefully.

Two pairs of eyes met. Held. Studied each other. Vulcan and Human. Dark, ebony, deep-seeing eyes held equally deep-seeing hazel ones, each comforted by the understanding they found there.

After another long, quietly comfortable moment, Kirk smiled, his smile lighting up his whole face like a star that suddenly goes nova. Not an answer, exactly. But not a question, either. A... reflection... of what the Human found deep within the ebony darkness of the Vulcan's eyes.

Those dark eyes glowed now with humour and a warmth that could find no outward expression, except for these brief, rare moments of personal closeness with his all-too-Human friend. A symbol for a friendship so unique and rare inexplicable thousands searched for but rarely found, a friendship found once in tens of thousands of generations of lifetimes. A thing most rare and precious. Spock thanked the All that he was chosen to be an integral part of *THE FRIENDSHIP* - as he himself had come to think of it, in capitals - a part not bound to fringe-limits as the Others often found themselves limited to.

For a moment his mind turned to the Others 'outside' his friendship with Kirk, his Human brother, his kindred spirit. How little they saw, those Others! Would they search, too, for what Spock had found? By accident? Because he had opened himself up to the possibility of 'someday'?

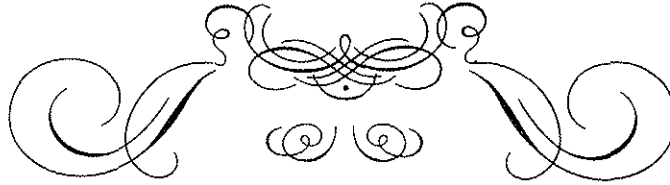
By accident, or by the All's design, Spock was so glad he had found, at last, that one special friend who saw him as he was, accepted Spock, for all his strangeness that surely the Human found

as alien, strange at times as Spock sometimes found some of that which the Human did...

The glow returned once more as the Others entered the bridge and took their stations as the Human and Vulcan turned back to their own assorted duties.

Neither alone. Neither lost in the Galactic Conglomerate, comforting and comfortable in the shared knowledge of,

I know you live. I care that you live... I am your friend.



PARADISE IS HERE

Lights blinking,
Consoles buzzing,
Screens are strangely blank,
Bridge stations all abandoned.

No communications,
No engineering sounds,
Empty spaces where friends should be,
All gone to Paradise below.

So angry.
Why have I been spared?
The plants are all around,
But the spores have no effect.

Something stirs,
An idea, a thought.
Is my anger somehow the key?
Can an answer still be found?

Anger works.
So now, my Vulcan friend,
How to get you angry
But still retain my life?

Transporter set,
I stand ready, if not willing,
To hurt the one I would not hurt
If another choice remained.

It's over.
I stand to gain my breath.
Welcome back to you, my friend,
To this Paradise we share.



Maureen Frost

THE DEADLY DESIGN

by

Synda Surgenor

Captain's Log, Stardate 4605.10

The Federation Medical Council has ordered the Enterprise to Cressid, a planet in the Hydra II system. From there we are to transport two of the Federation's most respected scientists and a Class 1A security cargo to the planet Taarken on the edge of Federation space. The cargo is a mutated virus, created by doctors Nastarian and Edge, which Dr. McCoy insists is so dangerous it should not be removed from the laboratory. He is extremely unhappy with the assignment, and has insisted on some very comprehensive precautions being taken...

And I can't say I blame him, Kirk thought as he hurried along the corridor. If it's only half as bad as he says it is, he has every right to be worried.

He turned into the transporter room where Spock, McCoy and Scott were waiting. "Sorry, gentlemen, I know I should have been here five minutes ago, but I've been chasing myself all day and I still haven't caught up!"

Spock's right eyebrow twitched, but he refrained from asking the obvious question and merely said, "Dr. Nastarian appears to be getting a little impatient, Captain."

"He's not the only one," McCoy grumbled. "The man isn't even on board yet, and already I can't wait to get rid of him - *and* his precious cargo!"

"Only two and a half days, Bones, then it'll all be over."

"I certainly hope so, Jim. I also hope," McCoy added grimly, "that you realize exactly how dangerous this business is! Just one tiny slip, and we'll have a deadly virus rampaging around the ship, killing everyone in sight! I've seen cases of Ruykens Disease - it ain't pretty, believe me! It doesn't just affect the respiratory system, it destroys it - and I understand this mutated version is something in the order of ten times more virulent! It kills in a matter of minutes, where Ruykens itself takes anything up to a day."

"Bones, you've told me all that already - quit worrying for Heaven's sake! You know we've taken every possible precaution. Nothing can go wrong."

"Famous last words, if ever I heard them!" McCoy muttered, but subsided as Kirk turned to Scott, who had taken up position behind the transporter console and given the order to energise.

The two Human forms which sparkled into existence on the platform were as different from each other as chalk and cheese.

Dr. Gianna Edge was relatively young, tall, and possessed of the sort of face and figure which caused those meeting her for the first time to imagine her in all sorts of exotic occupations, then be totally surprised when they discovered she was one of the Federation's top microbiologists.

Dr. Gregory Nastarian was middle-aged, short, fat, balding. His face was round, red-cheeked, with several chins, and his eyes a brilliant, penetrating blue. At the moment his expression was one of irritated impatience.

He stepped down from the transporter and interrupted Kirk's introductions and welcome aboard routine in mid-syllable.

"Thank you, Captain Kirk, but can we take all that as read? I'll only feel content when my box of tricks here is safely locked away where nothing can happen to it."

The "box of tricks" in question sat on the transporter platform. It was a metal container, twelve inches deep by eighteen inches square, security sealed and fitted with a code lock. Considering the contents, it should have looked sinister; instead, it appeared perfectly innocuous.

Kirk changed gear and direction with practised ease.

"No need to worry, Dr. Nastarian, we have a place prepared for you. If you and Dr. Edge will follow me?"

Spock stepped forward. "May I help?"

"No!" Nastarian said sharply. "Mr. Spock, I wouldn't let the Archangel Gabriel touch that box!" He smiled tightly. "I'm sorry, no offence intended."

"None taken, sir."

Spock stepped back, and Nastarian bent and picked up the container. Despite its heavy appearance he lifted it with ease, and after settling it carefully in his arms followed Kirk from the room, accompanied by the still silent Dr. Edge. Spock, Scott and McCoy fell in behind.

Five minutes later Nastarian was staring at Kirk in surprised disbelief as they stood in the corridor outside one of the Enterprise's top security cells.

"The *Brig*? You intend transporting my virus in your *Brig*?"

Kirk nodded. "We were ordered to provide maximum security and this is it! I realize it must seem unusual, but with the special arrangements we've made Dr. McCoy agrees that this is the safest place for your virus on the entire ship. In fact, he insists it's the *only* place for it."

Nastarian turned to McCoy. "Believe me, Doctor, I do understand your misgivings - I share them. Nastar B is extremely dangerous and should never have left my laboratory. This journey was not my idea. I, too, am under orders from the F.M.C."

"But *why*?" McCoy asked. "Why take this kind of risk with something that could wipe out half the Galaxy if it got loose?"

"Because of the Tarkenii," Nastarian said. "You know, of course, that the Medical Council was funding us in the search for a cure for Ruykens Disease?"

McCoy nodded.

Nastarian continued, "For three years all our efforts were useless, then six months ago we thought we had found a way of mutating the Ruykens virus so that when it began to develop in the cells of a victim it would turn on itself and be the agent of its own destruction. Unfortunately, what we created was Nastar B. The Tarkenii have been studying viral infections for many years, particularly those which are non-selective, which can affect different species. Nastar B certainly falls into *that* category; if it breathes - no matter *what* it breathes! - our little accident will kill it. The Tarkenii are fascinated. Apparently, Gianna and I have created something that they - medical geniuses though they may be - thought impossible; the ultimate, totally non-selective virus. They want to study it for themselves, but as you know they are planet-bound because no-one has ever managed to simulate their extraordinary environmental requirements - a fact which entails the mountain going to Mohammed, and pleases no-one involved."

He shrugged and sighed and turned back to Kirk. "I suppose, if I'm to be honest, I didn't know what to expect in the way of safety precautions on your ship, Captain Kirk. I've done my best by preparing this special container, but accidents *can* happen - and one with this little horror doesn't bear thinking about! Please explain those special arrangements you mentioned."

"They're simple, but should be effective - or so my experts assure me." Kirk flashed a quick smile at Spock and McCoy as he led the way into the small room. "Mr. Scott has installed a mini-magnetic field to hold the container immobile and so eliminate even the slightest possibility of the contents being damaged in any way. The ventilation system is fitted with special filters and the door with a forcefield barrier, not standard but specially adapted by Mr. Spock, so that if the unthinkable happened and your virus got loose in this room it would be contained here. The on/off mechanism for the forcefield has been fitted with a voicescan lock, which will respond only to your voice. And as a last precaution against outside interference of any kind, there will be a Security man on duty in the corridor at all times, so the container will be under constant observation."

There was a brief pause, then Gianna Edge spoke for the first time.

"Your precautions appear to be excellent, Captain Kirk." She had a soft, husky voice which complemented her appearance. "Gregory, the virus will be almost as safe here as it was in our laboratory."

"Indeed it will," Nastarian said. "Captain, I owe you an apology for my foolishness of a moment ago. For the first time since I had to agree to this journey, I feel almost content! Mr. Scott, let's get this thing settled - what must I do?"

He set the container down where Scott indicated and watched as the Engineer made several tiny adjustments to the magnetic field controls. At last, Scott was satisfied.

"That'll do it, sir. I can guarantee the Enterprise can loop and loop if she wants to, and yon box will no' even quiver!"

Outside in the corridor Spock indicated the wall-mounted box containing the controls for the forcefield, but Nastarian interrupted him.

"Captain, you said this would respond to my voice alone. I would prefer Gianna to have access also, if that can be done easily."

"Whatever you wish, sir." Kirk looked at his First Officer. "Spock?"

"No problem, Captain - just a minor adjustment."

Spock busied himself for a few seconds, then the two scientists spoke the necessary words to provide the voice scan for the computer. This done, at Spock's nod Nastarian said, "Forcefield - on!" and with an almost inaudible hum the edges of the doorway began to glow and the faint shimmer of the field flickered into being.

Kirk turned back from the nearby intercom.

"Security will have a man here in a moment," he said. "Dr. Nastarian, I've arranged quarters for you and Dr. Edge on Deck 5. Mr. Spock and I will take you there, and then, while you're settling in, I'm afraid he and I must return to the Bridge."

"When shall we begin our journey, Captain?" Gianna Edge asked. "I'm sure you agree, the sooner the better."

Kirk smiled at her. "We're already on our way, Dr. Edge. We broke orbit the moment you'd beamed aboard."

Further down the corridor the turbolift doors swished open and a tall young Security man emerged. Kirk saw him settled at his station, then led the others towards the waiting lift, his voice drifting back along the corridor as he went.

"I hope you'll do us the honour of dining with us tonight in the Senior Officers' Mess. I've arranged - "

The lift doors closed on his arrangements. The Security man, alone now, glanced over his shoulder at the innocent-looking box inside the cell, and shivered. He had not been told, officially, what he was guarding, but the Enterprise grapevine was extremely efficient.

Like Dr. McCoy, he couldn't wait to see the backs of their passengers.

The day after the Captain's dinner passed uneventfully. The Enterprise sped on her way at a steady Warp 3, gradually leaving the more populated areas of Federation space behind and drawing even nearer to where their destination pursued its complicated orbit around its double sun.

Kirk invited the two scientists to spend some time on the Bridge and personally took them on a tour of the ship. Spock showed off his computers and the Science labs, and Scott, his precious engines. McCoy was so pleased by Nastarian's voluble appreciation of the Enterprise's medical facilities that he proposed drinks and dinner in his quarters that evening, adding Kirk and Spock to the guest list almost as an afterthought.

Kirk grinned at him and accepted, then proceeded to warn Nastarian of McCoy's mean skill with a Finagle's Folly and various other concoctions. Spock, having been trapped by duty on the previous evening, had taken the precaution of arranging second shift duties for himself and was able to refuse - with considerable relief, since he had suffered through similar occasions in the past and had no desire to repeat the experience. McCoy, of course, saw through this subterfuge with ease, and a certain glint in his eye conveyed the information that Spock would suffer for it later. For now, though, having escaped was enough for the Vulcan.

When the third shift took over at midnight, having spent a quiet six hours working on some interesting problems with the computers and enjoying himself much more than he would have done at McCoy's dinner party, Spock signed off duty. He was very careful to avoid passing McCoy's quarters on the way back to his own. On one wished-to-be-forgotten occasion the doctor had waylaid him, and dragged him, protesting, into the tail-end of one of his parties. That experience had been enough to scar even a Vulcan for life!

On the Bridge the duty personnel saw him go, and relaxed as soon as the turbolift doors closed. On this, the "graveyard shift", only four stations were actually manned; communications, navigation and engineering by ensigns, and the helm by Lt. McMichael, who also had the con. Everything else was tied in, via the computer, to the displays on the helm/navigation console.

McMichael checked ship's status, found everything at green - only to be expected when Spock was doing the handing over! - and leaned back in his chair.

"Okay, everybody, you can get out your knitting! We've got six hours of nerve-racking non-excitement ahead of us - I don't know how we'll survive!"

"We pass solar system C40K in one hour twenty minutes. That should liven things up!" Ensign Garfield on navigation reminded him.

"Oh, wonderful! A second rate star with one lifeless ball of rock going round and round it," McMichael groaned. "You just made my day, Garfield! To think I joined Starfleet for all this. The thrill may be too much for me!"

The banter continued. McMichael had been in charge of third shift on the Bridge for nearly a standard month now, and he had his companions had fused into a team, one which got the job done but in a relaxed, light-hearted fashion. So far there had been no emergencies, but McMichael, who intended going places in Starfleet, hoped that when one did occur he would cope with it efficiently and successfully. He had no intention of doing anything else if it could be helped.

Solar system C40K showed up exactly on schedule, looming out of the interstellar background as the Enterprise swept past it. McMichael was logging the fact when Garfield said,

"That's funny!"

"You thought of another good joke?" Ensign Raeburn at communications asked.

"Shut up - I'm being serious. Lieutenant, somebody's just activated the main transporter. The light came on."

McMichael leaned over Garfield's shoulder.

"It's not on now."

"I know. It's gone off. But it was on, I tell you. I saw it."

"There's no place to transport to out here except empty space. It's a malfunction."

"We were within transporter range of that ball of rock we just passed when the light came on. And if it's a malfunction, it's not at this end," Garfield said flatly.

McMichael stared at him for a moment, then thumbed a switch.

"Transporter room, this is the Bridge. Come in please."

Silence.

"Main transporter room, respond please. This is the Bridge."

Still silence.

"If the technician has just popped out for a coffee, he ain't gonna be too pleased about this." McMichael thumbed the switch again. "Security!"

"Security. Lt. Hamlyn here."

"Hi, Chuck! This is McMichael on the Bridge. Look, we've got a transporter function light showing up here when it shouldn't, and I can't get any response from the transporter room. Will you go shake 'em up for me? I think it's Ensign Dodswell who's supposed to be on duty there."

"Sure, Dave. No problem."

In less than two minutes the intercom bleeped.

"McMichael, this is Hamlyn. You'd better call the Captain. Dodswell's lying in the middle of the transporter room in a pool of blood, and unless I'm much mistaken, he's extremely dead!"

For a frozen fraction of a second McMichael stared straight ahead at the starstrewn viewscreen, then he thumped several switches in quick succession.

"Yellow alert! Yellow alert! Bridge to Captain Kirk!"

Kirk woke to the simultaneous wail of the alert signal and the bleep of the intercom, and took a white-faced McMichael's report as he pulled on his uniform.

"Good work, Lieutenant. No need to alert Security, Hamlyn will have that in hand. You carry on up there for the time being. Tell Dr. McCoy to meet Mr. Spock and myself in the transporter room. Kirk out."

Spock, as Kirk had expected, emerged into the corridor at the same time as himself, and the Captain explained the reason for the yellow alert on the run to the transporter room. McCoy arrived there almost on their heels and required only a few seconds for his examination.

"He's been stabbed, Jim, between the ribs and straight through the heart, by someone who knew where to aim. And if the expression on his face is anything to go by, the killer was someone he trusted to come real close, and he got one hell of a surprise when this happened."

"Who would do such a thing, Bones? And *why*?" Kirk asked.

"In answer to your first question, Captain, I would say the person who used the transporter."

Kirk and McCoy turned towards Spock who, after a quick glance at Ensign Dodswell's body, had gone directly to the transporter control console and had completed his examination as quickly as McCoy. He continued,

"Ensign Garfield was correct. The transporter has been activated, the pre-set co-ordinates are still locked in, and they agree with the Ensign's suggestion that the destination was the barren planet of solar system C40K. As to your second question....."

"The answer's pretty obvious," Kirk said. "Whoever it was wants to remain anonymous for as long as possible, and he wasn't taking any chances of Dodswell's talking. What I'd like to know is the reason behind it all - why should anyone want to beam down to that God-forsaken ball of rock in the first place, let alone kill a harmless kid like Dodswell for the privilege of doing so? Mr. X has a lot of questions to answer when we catch up with him!"

The wall intercom bleeped. "Security to Captain Kirk!"

Kirk punched the 'receive' button. "Kirk here. Go ahead."

"Captain, Lt. Commander Giotto here. There's been a second murder."

"WHAT?"

"It's Security Ensign Davison, sir. He didn't respond to the alert signal, and when I sent someone to check on him he was found dead." Giotto hesitated. "Captain, he was on special assignment duty by the top security cell in the Brig. I also have to report that although the forcefield barrier is still operative, the contents of the cell appear to have been disturbed."

"I'm on my way."

Kirk turned back to the others, to McCoy whose eyes reflected the sudden apprehension in his own, and a Vulcan whose carefully controlled expression spoke volumes.

"May I suggest, Captain, that you may have found your 'reason behind it all' rather sooner than expected?" Spock's voice was utterly toneless.

"You may, Mr. Spock. You may also join me in hoping that we're wrong!" Kirk ran impatient fingers through already untidy hair. "In the meantime - Hamlyn, you stay here. Spock, I want the alert upped to red, and get this ship turned round, we're going back to system C40K. Then bring our two passengers to the Brig. Bones, let's go!"

He was out the door and running almost before he had finished speaking, McCoy hard on his heels.

In the Brig they found a grim-faced Giotto and two other security men waiting for them. On the deck was the crumpled body of Ensign Davison.

McCoy dropped on one knee and ran his medi-scanner over it.

"Same as Dodswell, Jim, right down to the surprised expression."

"And someone has been in here, Bones - come and look."

McCoy joined Kirk by the cell door and looked inside. What he saw through the faint shimmer of the forcefield made him shiver involuntarily. The box which contained the virus had indeed been disturbed. The lid was slightly askew, the security seals had been broken, and the open codelock lay on the deck beside it.

"If that thing has been stolen, God help us all!" McCoy muttered grimly.

"It does seem the most reasonable explanation for all of this." Kirk's gesture took in Davison's body and that of Dodswell in the distant transporter room.

"But who?" McCoy asked. "And how? Only Nastarian and Gianna Edge can operate the forcefield."

"Exactly." Kirk's voice had developed a sudden chill.

McCoy stared at him. "But Jim... Look, I hate to sound like Spock, but that idea ain't logical. The virus belongs to them, they don't have to steal it! It's not possible."

"As Spock's so fond of saying in other circumstances - there are always possibilities, Doctor."

He was interrupted by the abrupt arrival of Dr. Nastarian and Spock. Nastarian, after a quick shuddering glance at Davison's body, went straight to the cell door and peered inside.

"Where's Dr. Edge?" Kirk asked.

"Not in her quarters, Captain," Spock replied. "When I apprised Dr. Nastarian of what has occurred he seemed most disturbed by that fact and insisted she must be found. I have instituted a security search of the ship."

"You won't find her - not if the virus is gone, and I'm very much afraid it is. She was the only person, other than myself, who knew the code for the lock on the container, and it is obvious from here that it has been opened, not forced."

Nastarian's expression was grim as he turned towards the forcefield controls. Kirk's outstretched hand stopped him. "Wait. Is there any danger of the cell being contaminated?"

"Not the slightest, Captain. The phials are vacuum sealed for extra safety. They would have to be opened or smashed deliberately."

"I meant deliberately," Kirk said. Nastarian looked at him, startled. "Could that room be a trap waiting to be sprung? Two of

my men have been murdered - why hesitate at the rest of us?"

"Oh, no, Captain. No." Nastarian shook his head. "I know Gianna and her reason for doing this. She's a very direct person. Your two young men died because they were unfortunate enough to get between her and something she wants very much. She doesn't see the rest of us as a threat - if she did, we'd be dying already. That room is perfectly safe to enter."

Before Kirk could do anything further to prevent him he had deactivated the forcefield and stepped through the doorway. Despite the assurance given, despite the knowledge that if Nastarian were wrong it would do no good, Kirk found himself holding his breath as he, Spock and McCoy followed. He had to make a conscious effort to breathe normally, and out of the corner of his eye he could see that McCoy was having the same trouble.

Nastarian bent over the container and with hands that trembled slightly removed the lid and they looked inside. The thickly padded interior marked with the two empty indentations which had held the phials of Nastar B stared blankly back at them.

"Both gone," Nastarian sighed. "And the tapes of our research notes. They were in here too."

"Why?" McCoy demanded. "You said she had a reason - what possible reason could any normal, sane person have for doing something like this?"

"None at all, Dr. McCoy." Nastarian's shoulders dropped wearily. "But I don't think Gianna is sane any longer - and God forgive me, I should have recognised that fact sooner. If I had, this would never have happened! Her reason is revenge, Doctor - revenge on the Romulans!"

McCoy stared at him blankly. Kirk saw Spock's eyebrows begin to climb.

"Ten years ago," Nastarian said. "You remember the attack on Fengal IX?"

"A mining planet on the edge of the neutral zone," Spock answered. "The colony there was annihilated by a Romulan vessel which they themselves later destroyed, claiming it was a renegade which had also attacked one of their own worlds."

"Exactly. Gianna lost her entire family, and her fiance, in that massacre," Nastarian said. "She had a sort of breakdown at the time, but soon recovered, or at least appeared to do so. She did some of her finest work in the following years, and I made her my partner, and we began the experiments which led to our accidental creation of Nastar B. That's when I found out she had never really recovered at all - in fact, she appeared to have become totally obsessed by one thing. The Romulans must be made to pay for those deaths, and in Nastar B she saw the perfect weapon for her revenge. She tried to get the Federation interested in its military use, but they were as disturbed by its properties as I was, and rejected the idea totally. Then she tried to involve me in her scheme. I should have reported her - insisted that she had treatment - but I was foolish enough to believe I could talk her out of it. I thought I had succeeded - my God, what a fool I was!"

Kirk's spine felt as though it were encased in ice. From

McCoy's expression it was obvious that he felt the same way.

"She wanted to let that thing loose on innocent people?"

"On Romulans, Dr. McCoy, who to her mind are something less than innocent."

"They're people, God dammit!" McCoy snapped. "She *must* be insane!"

Kirk said, "How did she expect to get across the neutral zone?"

Nastarian shrugged. "She had several schemes. One was to acquire a ship somehow and simply fly into Romulan space, contaminating as many worlds as possible before being detected. Another was to take the virus to the Klingons, enlist their aid - "

"The Klingons!" McCoy and Kirk spoke together. McCoy steam-rollered on. "If *they* got their hands on something like Nastar B they'd use it on *everybody* - Romulans, the Federation, their own grandmothers... Jim, we have to find her!"

"I know it, Bones. What I can't understand, Dr. Nastarian, is why she waited until now to kill my men to get it. She could have taken it more easily from your laboratory at any time."

Nastarian shrugged again. "I don't understand that either - but who does understand the working of a sick mind? And Gianna *is* sick, Captain, she must be! But whatever her reasons for waiting, she couldn't afford to wait any longer. After the Tarkenii had tested it for themselves the virus was going to be destroyed. The Federation Medical Council had decided it was just too dangerous to be allowed to exist any longer. She had to take it now - or not at all."

Out in the corridor the intercom bleeped. Spock went to answer it. In a moment he returned.

"Security reports that Dr. Edge is definitely not on board Captain. Lt. McMichael reports from the bridge that forward scanners reveal a Klingon Scout Class vessel in orbit around the planet of system C40K."

Nastarian groaned. "*That's* why she waited until now! She must have arranged in some way to meet them there."

"Why didn't our scanners show that ship in the area until now?" Kirk demanded angrily.

"They must have concealed themselves in the blind spot behind the sun as we approached, Captain," Spock said, "then emerged when we were out of sensor range."

"We've got to prevent them getting hold of that virus!" McCoy insisted.

"That's just what I intend doing, Bones!" Kirk snapped. "Let's go!"

He was heading for the turbolift, the others close on his heels, when the corridor intercom bleeped again. He punched the button.

"Kirk here!"

"Captain, this is McMichael. E.T.A. at system C40K two minutes. The Klingon ship just beamed several persons up from the planet and is breaking orbit - correction, sir, they have broken orbit and are moving away on course 284 mark 8 at Warp 5. That is a direct heading for Klingon space, Captain."

"We're on our way, Mr. McMichael."

On the Bridge all the stations were now manned in response to the red alert. Spock went directly to his computers, and McMichael handed over the command chair with alacrity and resumed the helm. Kirk sat down and said,

"Report, Mr. Spock."

"The Klingon vessel is still withdrawing at maximum speed, Captain. No other ships in the area. Scanners show one life form remaining on the planet. Human, not Klingon."

"Captain!" Ensign Raeburn looked up from communications. "I'm picking up a signal from the planet - it's on a communicator channel."

"Put it on audio, Lieutenant."

The voice came through, fading, weak.

"Please... help me... come back..."

"That's Gianna!" Nastarian had followed them to the Bridge and stood with McCoy behind Kirk's chair.

"Captain!" Spock again. "Life signs are fading."

"Jim - " McCoy began.

"I'm not about to abandon her, Bones," Kirk said. "Mr. McMichael, assume standard orbit and take the con again. Watch that Klingon ship. I want to know exactly what he does. Mr. Raeburn, order four environmental suits to the transporter room. Spock, Bones, Dr. Nastarian - let's go."

In the turbolift he turned to Nastarian. "Sir, I didn't mean to sound as though I was ordering you - I'm asking, will you beam down with us? I need you to handle the virus - in the admittedly unlikely event that the Klingons haven't taken it with them."

"If you hadn't asked I would have insisted on going in any case," Nastarian said. "Gianna is - was - colleague, friend, partner - whatever she has become, I want to help in any way I can."

In the transporter room the suits were waiting. It was the work of only moments to climb into them and step up onto the platform.

Scotty, behind the console, faded from view and was replaced by a bleak, rocky landscape, the ground underfoot split and fissured in many places, scattered with clumps of tumbled boulders of varying sizes. Far off on the horizon, jagged mountains clawed up towards the diamond-hard glitter of the stars in a black, airless sky.

Spock consulted his tricorder and pointed. "That way, Captain."

They plunged between the surrounding boulders, Kirk in the lead, and came at last to a small clear area. Against one of the larger rocks, the suited figure of Gianna Edge half sat, half lay. McCoy pushed past Kirk and dropped on one knee beside her, medi-scanner whirring busily.

After a moment he looked up.

"She's dying, Jim. We have to get her up to sickbay."

"Wait!" Nastarian knelt beside McCoy, reached out and touched Dr. Edge's shoulder. "Gianna! It's me - Gregory."

Behind the transparent faceplate Gianna Edge's eyes fluttered open and slowly focused. Her voice was a thready whisper.

"Gregory? Is...it really you?"

"Yes, my dear. I'm here. You're ill - what has happened to you? Is it the virus?"

"Yes-s-s." A spasm of harsh coughing wracked her.

Nastarian looked at the others, shaking his head.

"It's no use. You can't take her back to the ship. You'd only spread the infection, and she'll be dead in a few minutes anyway. There's nothing anyone can do. Nothing!"

Gianna Edge's voice sounded again in their helmets. For a moment it was stronger, almost normal.

"Those... devils! You were right to call me a fool - I shouldn't have trusted them. I thought... they would help me... but they only wanted it for themselves... They laughed... when they infected me... Said they wanted to see if... what was in it was... as good... as I said..."

Her voice faded in another paroxysm of coughing and a stream of frothy blood trickled from one corner of her mouth. When the painful sounds subsided her eyes were closed again, and her breathing was very faint and irregular.

Kirk bent and grasped her shoulder and shook it. "Dr. Edge! Gianna!"

McCoy said, "Jim - let her die in peace."

"We have to know, Bones!" Kirk shook her again. "Dr. Edge!"

Her eyes fluttered open once more, focused even more slowly than before.

"Gianna - where are the phials of Nastar B? Do the Klingons have them?"

"Yes-s-s - they took....it..." Her voice was so weak they had to strain to hear her. Slowly, painfully, she turned her head, eyes searching until they found Nastarian. "I'm... sorry... I..." Her head fell to one side.

McCoy checked his scanner, said the unnecessary words. "She's gone."

Nastarian stood abruptly and walked away a few steps to stand with his back towards the others, breathing heavily.

Kirk straightened and opened a communicator channel to this ship. As he did so he caught a glimpse of Spock's face behind the faceplate of his suit.

The Vulcan's expression was peculiar, a mixture of puzzlement and abstraction, which vanished as soon as his eyes met Kirk's. About to ask what was the matter, Kirk was distracted when Raeburn's voice spoke in his helmet.

"Enterprise. Go ahead."

"Kirk here. What's that Klingon ship doing?"

"McMichael answered. "Still running, Captain. Heading for home straight down the middle of the road as fast as his engines will take him."

"Right. Prepare to beam us up and get ready to break orbit - we're going after him."

"Aye, sir."

Nastarian turned back to face them, his expression troubled. "Captain Kirk, we can't take Gianna's body back on board. It would spread infection - "

Kirk shook his head. "Don't worry, Bones will work something out and we'll come back for her. For now, the important thing is to get after that ship and recover your virus."

"Or destroy it - and them," McCoy said. "We can't let them get away with it, Jim."

Nastarian groaned. "If only I'd had the sense to see what was happening to Gianna before it came to this! But at least - she said she was sorry; at the end she seemed to realise what she had done, didn't she?"

Kirk laid a hand on his arm. "Maybe. I hope so. For the moment - " he touched his communicator - "Scotty, energise!"

Back on the Bridge Kirk once more relieved McMichael of the command chair, and fired a barrage of orders. The Enterprise pulled away from the lifeless planet and flung herself after the Klingon scoutship. The Starship had three warp factors in hand over the Klingon vessel and Scott, knowing what was at stake, produced Warp 8 without, for once, any complaints about the strain on his precious engines.

Behind the Captain's chair McCoy and Nastarian stood watching the stars stream across the forward viewscreen as the Enterprise slowly and certainly overhauled the fleeing Klingons. Eventually, Spock, who had been bent over his computers and hooded viewer since returning to the ship, looked up.

The Klingon vessel should be visible on our screen, Captain. We are well within communication range."

"Mr. Raeburn " Kirk ordered, "open hailing frequencies to that ship and order them to stop."

Raeburn busied himself. "No response, Captain. They're ignoring our signal."

"And taking evasive action," Spock said.

"Stay with them, Mr. McMichael."

"Aye, sir."

McMichael's hands moved quickly and delicately on his board and the Enterprise followed the twists and turns of the alien ship as though attached to it.

Kirk turned back to Raeburn.

"Ensign, open that frequency again. Klingon scout ship, this is Captain James T. Kirk commanding the United Starship Enterprise. You have violated Federation territory and we have reason to believe that you have stolen Federation property on board; therefore I order you to stop and permit yourself to be boarded and searched. If you do not, I shall be forced to fire on you."

He waited and was not unduly surprised when there still was no response from the other ship, which now hung large in the centre of the viewscreen as the Enterprise matched speed with it, only a few kilometres distant. If that was the way they wanted to play it...

"Prepare phasers, Mr. Garfield."

Spock said suddenly, "Captain - "

Garfield had seen it too, and his hands were already moving in anticipation of the order. The forward deflector shield strengthened just in time to stop the Klingon phaser beam.

Kirk noted the speed of Garfield's reaction. Relatively inexperienced though they were, all of these youngsters were responding like veterans to this dangerous situation, and would be commended for it later.

The Bridge vibrated with the force of the deflected hit. When things steadied, Kirk said,

"Return fire, Mr. Garfield. Aim just ahead of them. We want to persuade them to stop, if possible."

The Enterprise's phaser beams reached out and whipped across the bows of the Klingon vessel, missing it by the merest whisker. Almost immediately the Klingons fired back, as they did so banking sharply and speeding off on yet another course change.

"Don't lose them, Mr. McMichael," Kirk said softly. The great ship was already turning as he spoke, and shuddering under the second deflected hit, then the Klingon ship was back in centre screen again. "Mr. Garfield, fire phasers again. This time - aim for them!"

Garfield's hands moved over his console and twin beams of blue light leaped across the distance separating the two ships.

There was a blinding flash of white light where the Klingon ship had been. The Enterprise viewscreen automatically stepped down its brilliance, but even so those on the Bridge had to protect their eyes as the starship's phasers pierced the weaker shields of the smaller ship and the matter/antimatter in its engines erupted devastatingly.

When they could see again, the Klingon ship had gone as though it had never been. Only the blackness of space, speckled with the stars, filled the screen.

For the first time since the alert signal and the intercom had dragged him into wakefulness, Kirk began to relax. His eyes caught sight of the Bridge chronometer - was it really less than an hour? It seemed incredible that so much could have happened in so short a time. All around there was a perceptible lessening in the tension which had enfolded them since the first alert, a shuffling of feet, a slowing of the breathing rate.

He punched a button on the chair arm, "Cancel red alert!" and watched the flashing lights die. "Mr. McMichael, reverse course back to solar system C40K, warp factor 2."

"Aye, sir."

McCoy leaned an elbow on the back of the command chair. "Well, Jim, that's that." He glanced at Nastarian. "I guess your trip to Taarken is going to be a wasted one, sir."

"Captain Kirk did what he had to do, Doctor." Nastarian shook his head bitterly. "Had I recognised sooner that Gianna's obsession has become more than that, none of this would have happened. Your two young men - Gianna herself - even those Klingons - would still be alive."

"Stop blaming yourself," Kirk told him. "Just be thankful, as I am, that we got off so lightly - that it's all over now."

"No, Captain. It is not over yet."

Kirk swivelled his chair towards the science station. Spock had turned his own chair to face into the well of the Bridge and was sitting straight-backed as usual, his hands clasped loosely in his lap. There was that about him which caused a tiny presentiment to lay icy fingers on the back of Kirk's neck. Before he could speak, however, McCoy had jumped in.

"What do you mean, Spock, it's not all over yet?"

"I mean, Doctor, that I believe there is still a phial of Nastar B unaccounted for."

Suddenly the tension which had dissipated moments before was back, more intense than ever. All eyes were on Spock.

Kirk said slowly, "Both phials were destroyed with the Klingon ship, Mr. Spock."

Spock shook his head. "Please recall Dr. Edge's words shortly before she died, Captain. She always referred to 'it', never to 'them' as one would have expected her to do if speaking of both phials. The first time was when she told Dr. Nastarian that the

Klingons had infected her because they wanted to see if what was in it was as good as I said it was. I put her use of the word down to a slip of the tongue, due to her condition. On the second occasion, however, there could be no mistake."

"She said Yes, they took it when I asked her if the Klingons had taken the phials," Kirk remembered. "But Spock, if they did only get one, where is the other one? What did she do with it? Could she have hidden it somewhere down on the planet till she saw which way the Klingons were going to jump?"

"I think not, Captain. I believe it is still on the Enterprise."

"Why?" McCoy demanded. "Why steal both of them then leave one here where she could never get hold of it again? That's not logical, Spock!"

Spock ignored the interruption. "Why did the two young Ensigns die, Captain?"

Kirk blinked at the sudden change of direction. "We assumed, to buy time, didn't we? Dodswell to prevent him telling us who had used the transporter, and Davison to stop him saying who had taken the virus from the brig."

"If so, then the ploy was singularly unsuccessful," Spock said. "Despite their deaths, we discovered very quickly that Dr. Edge was the culprit. Is it not more logical to assume that they were killed to prevent their revealing the identity of someone else, someone who was going to remain on the ship and therefore must not be discovered? In short, an accomplice, Captain, who would retain the second phial of virus as a failsafe in case the attempt to enlist Klingon aid went wrong?"

Nastarian spoke for the first time. "Mr. Spock, that's impossible! How could Gianna have an accomplice? She knew no-one on the Enterprise."

Spock said, in a voice totally without emphasis, "She knew you, sir."

For the second or so before the import of the words registered, Nastarian's expression remained unchanged. Then suddenly his cheeks reddened.

"Me? Oh, no - no, Mr. Spock! I have said several times that Gianna tried to persuade me to join her, but I refused. How dare you accuse me of lying! Captain Kirk, I will not be so insulted! Is your First Officer often given to such flights of fancy?"

Two Vulcan eyebrows rose abruptly. "I am accusing you of nothing, sir. I am merely enumerating some conclusions I have drawn from observed data which I believe is not at all fanciful. May I continue, Captain?"

The chill which had started on the back of Kirk's neck had travelled right down his spine and spread through to settle in the pit of his stomach. Despite his denial, Spock's words could be taken as accusatory, but Kirk couldn't see where the proof to back them was coming from - and there had better be such proof, or Spock was in trouble. A man like Nastarian wouldn't let such a matter rest - indeed, Kirk himself couldn't let it rest now; a doubt had been

raised in his mind, a question asked which demanded an answer.

He nodded slowly, ignoring Nastarian's angry glare. "Please proceed, Mr. Spock - but carefully. Very carefully."

"Of course, Captain." Spock shifted slightly in his chair and went on calmly. "Dr. Nastarian has indeed told us more than once that Dr. Edge tried to enlist his aid, and Dr. Edge's statement that he called her a fool if she trusted the Klingons confirmed that they had indeed discussed such matters. But... I was somewhat puzzled as to why Dr. Edge should consider that Dr. Nastarian might be open to such persuasion, so when I returned to the ship I ran some checks with the computer, and discovered that Dr. Nastarian has been... rather less than completely open with us."

"In what way?"

"He told us that Dr. Edge had lost her entire family in the Fengal IX massacre and that this loss was the root cause of her present actions. He neglected to tell us that he too had sustained a similar loss on the same occasion - his wife and small son."

Kirk swung his chair slightly to look at Nastarian. "Is this true?"

The scientist's cheeks flared red again. "Of course it is! My wife and child were visiting her parents when the Romulans attacked. My loss enabled me to understand and sympathise with Gianna's pain - it does not mean I shared her insane desire to destroy all Romulans for what was done by that one ship. Surely you can see that? I didn't mention it because it is my own personal affair, and I considered it completely irrelevant to the situation."

"I will decide what is irrelevant or otherwise when my ship and crew are involved, Dr. Nastarian," Kirk said sharply. He turned back to Spock. "Go on. I take it there's more?"

"Indeed, Captain," Spock said. "For Dr. Edge to have arranged to be picked up by the Klingons on C40K she would have had to contact them. According to the computer she has not left the Research complex on Cressid for at least two years, long before Nastar 8 came into existence. Dr. Nastarian, however, has been off-world several times, the most recent being when he spoke at a symposium on Earth, returning to his laboratory only one week ago, after details of this journey had been finalised. The ship he travelled on stopped over for a few hours at Space Station K7, an open station as you know, Captain, frequented by all races - including Klingons."

"I had two quiet drinks in a small bar on the Space Station. I saw no Klingons - or any other races!" Nastarian snapped angrily. "Please don't insult my intelligence further by denying that you're accusing me of being Gianna's mythical accomplice, Mr. Spock. Prove it! I want concrete proof - not the ravings of an over-active imagination - something I didn't think Vulcans possessed. Show us proof of my complicity - or I'll have your career for this."

"Such proof as you require is easily forthcoming, sir," Spock said coolly. "Captain Kirk need only ask Lt. Commander Giotto to run the tapes for the relevant times from the Security cameras in the brig and transporter room and we shall see Dr. Edge and her companion - whoever he may be."

"But - "

Kirk got no further. Nastarian moved, surprisingly fast. He had left his position by the command chair and was standing with his back to the turbolift doors almost before anyone had realized what he had done.

"Well! Dear me, it seems I too have been foolish. I never even considered the possibility of Security cameras. It won't be necessary to run those tapes, Captain - not necessary at all!"

There was a long silence. Every eye on the Bridge was locked on the small, sealed glass phial which had appeared as if by magic and was being held between the thumb and forefinger of Nastarian's right hand. Eventually he laughed. It was not a humorous sound.

"Well, Captain, it seems I am forced to admit after all that your clever Vulcan is right. The virus was *not* all destroyed, as you can see. Yes, Gianna and I were partners in this as in everything else - but she was such a fool! She actually believed that the Klingons would help us. Using them was her idea, and she would not be talked out of it, so finally I agreed to try it. But it's just as well for our plans that *my* mind is not clouded by insanity and I could prepare against their treachery. Poor Gianna - for one so clever she could be very stupid at times. She really believed she could take the virus, get off this ship, and be well away with her friends before any of you realised what had happened. I knew all along that it was impossible, which is why I so helpfully told you all about her - besides, doing so prevented suspicion falling on me. She made an excellent scapegoat! And it worked - at least until he started putting two and two together."

His look in Spock's direction was composed of pure venom.

Kirk spoke slowly, carefully. "Dr. Nastarian, why don't you put that down? Better still, give it to Bones here to take care of it. Holding it like that can't be very safe - suppose you dropped it?"

"Oh, it's tougher than it looks, Captain. *DON'T MOVE!*"

Scott, at the Engineering station, had begun to edge forward, but froze into immobility at the sharp command. Nastarian scowled and brandished the phial of virus. "Don't try any of your tricks on me! I'm not a madman who can be fooled! I said this was tough, but it won't survive being smashed on the floor, which is what I'll do if you try anything - and then you'll all die!"

"You would die also," Kirk said.

"Of course! But for ten years all I've lived for are my plans for revenge - such beautiful plans... You could almost say they kept me warm on cold nights, Captain Kirk." Nastarian smiled, a brief showing of teeth that lacked amusement. "Gianna and I were truly of one mind. We worked together so hard, searching out the right kind of virus, one that was ripe for development in the way we wanted. The Ruykens virus was perfect for our designs."

"You mean the mutation *wasn't* accidental? You worked for it deliberately - from the very beginning?" McCoy's voice was hoarse.

"Certainly, Doctor. Happy accidents like that don't just happen - or at least not conveniently enough for our purposes. We worked for it, as you say." Nastarian turned back to Kirk. "If I can't

have that revenge which I've dreamed of all these years, I'm perfectly willing to die. Are you, Captain? Not only to die yourself, which would be easy for someone like you, but to be responsible for taking every man and woman on this ship with you?" He studied Kirk's expression and laughed chillingly again. "I thought not. So just be careful - eh?"

"You appear to have us at your mercy, sir." Spock, as usual, sounded utterly cool, calm and collected. It would have required very close scrutiny indeed for anyone to see the signs of tension in the lean figure. "What are your intentions towards us?"

Nastarian smiled widely, his earlier anger with the Vulcan apparently forgotten. McCoy winced inwardly and thought he had never seen anything so frightening in his life.

"Well, now, Mr. Spock, my first intention is that all you people on this level of the Bridge move down there beside the Captain's chair where I can watch you all more easily."

"That's impossible!" Kirk protested. "They're needed at their stations - the running of the ship - "

"Dear Captain Kirk, please don't be stupid." Nastarian's smile died and his voice hardened. "Have you forgotten taking me on that very interesting tour yesterday, and explaining with such pride how everything could be run from the helm/navigation console? I haven't. Do it!"

"Do as he says," Kirk said wearily.

Reluctantly, the order was obeyed, and one by one the functions of each station were transferred and it was abandoned. Raeburn and Spock were the last to move. As Raeburn stood he suddenly stumbled and fell forward across his console, putting out a hand to save himself. Spock was at his side instantly, bending over him and grasping his arm.

"Ensign, are you all right?"

"Oh - yes, sir. It's okay, I... I'm fine, I think..." Raeburn began to straighten self-consciously under Spock's enquiring gaze. "I just felt a bit dizzy. I - I guess I must have stood up too quickly."

"I suggest that you allow Dr. McCoy to check your condition, Ensign."

"Oh, no - that won't be necessary - "

"I insist, Mr. Raeburn. Dizziness caused by sudden movement cannot be tolerated in a serving Starship officer."

"I'm all right now, really - " Raeburn scuttled down into the well of the Bridge, only to be brought up short by McCoy and his medi-scanner.

"You're right, Ensign - there doesn't appear to be anything wrong with you, but I'll check you out properly in sickbay later to be on the safe side. Next time, try to remember who's the doctor around here!"

"Yessir." A red-faced Raeburn tried to appear invisible.

Nastarian said sarcastically, "Now that the *medical emergency* is over, perhaps you'd be kind enough to join the others, Mr. Spock?"

Spock did so, coming to rest in his usual position by Kirk's shoulder, hands clasped behind his back. Kirk glanced up at him briefly, and in return received a blandly innocent look which told him, better than any words, that Spock was up to something. He thought *I wish he could tell me what it is*, and straightened slightly in his chair, waiting for whatever was about to happen, wanting to be ready.

Nastarian looked down on them from his elevation and nodded in satisfaction.

"That's better. Now - my second intention is that we all take a little trip together. I hadn't planned on being discovered, but what might have been a problem could turn out to be a godsend! I had originally thought to rejoin Gianna later if things had gone well, but since they didn't I must utilise another plan which I, personally, find much more satisfying. The Enterprise will do splendidly for it. You will take me across the Neutral Zone and we shall contaminate as many planets as possible before the Romulans realize what we're up to and come after us. This ship is big, fast, well-armed - we shall take a lot of them with us before the end."

Kirk found his voice only at the second attempt. "I'll be damned if I will!"

"You'll be damned if you don't!" Nastarian snapped. He held the phial of Nastar B up in the air at arm's length. "Captain, do you really want all your people to die - everyone on this ship? If you don't do as I say, I'll drop this - believe me, I will! Think about it - but not for *too* long."

Kirk didn't have to think about it at all. Nastarian meant what he said, that much was obvious. Defiance would mean a horrifying death for over 400 people. If saving them meant he had to play along for a while, then that's what he would do. The man was utterly insane, he was bound to make a mistake sooner rather than later, and he couldn't stay awake for ever.

Kirk took a deep breath, and was pleased to discover that his voice was perfectly under control again.

"I believe you. As Mr. Spock said, you appear to have us at your mercy."

Nastarian smiled that frightening smile again. "I thought you'd see it my way in the end. I believe the Neutral Zone is in that direction, Captain, and I suggest we get there as quickly as possible. Warp factor 8 will do very nicely."

Scott protested. "The engines will never stand a prolonged Warp 8 - "

"You'd better pray they do, Mr. Scott," Nastarian said coldly, "because if they fail, so does my hold on the virus."

"Don't argue, Scotty, just give him what he wants," Kirk ordered. "Mr. Garfield, give me a course for the Neutral Zone."

Reluctantly, Garfield complied. "Computed and laid in, sir."

"Mr. McMichael - execute. Warp factor 8."

The great ship banked, turned, and gathered speed on her new heading. Nastarian rested his shoulders against the wall by the lift doors and surveyed the tense figures in front of him. He was smiling again.

Spock said, "Dr. Nastarian, having successfully hijacked the ship and forced us to change course at your bidding, may I suggest that you will find it extremely fatiguing to stand by the turbolift until we reach the Neutral Zone? I calculate that our journey will take approximately ten hours forty seven minutes at Warp factor 8. You would be much more comfortable if you sat down."

"I'm perfectly all right where I am. I don't tire easily and I want to watch you all."

"But, sir," Spock insisted, "although you do indeed have a perfect view of the Bridge from your present position by the lift entrance, having placed us all here by the command chair you could keep us under observation with equal ease from any of the seats, and as I have said, be more comfortable."

"Shut up! I'm staying here!" Nastarian shouted.

"Spock!" Kirk warned. "If this was part of whatever plan Spock was working on, it was getting extremely dangerous. The little scientist's face was flaring red with anger again, and the hand holding the phial was trembling violently."

"For God's sake! Whose side are you on?" McCoy hissed out of one corner of his mouth.

Spock lifted an eyebrow at him, but McCoy didn't notice. He was too busy watching Nastarian.

The man's sanity was slipping by the minute, had been since he took over the Bridge. This was no sudden madness, this was something which had been a long time growing, despite his insistence that he was sane. Those were the most dangerous, the most difficult to treat madmen, the ones who thought there was nothing wrong with them.

Dammit, as a doctor he should have seen something - there must have been signs which he should have recognised. Instead, he had been lulled by the man's reputation as a scientist, taken him at face value, and now the ship was in this mess - all because he hadn't been doing his job properly.

McCoy was in the midst of this silent self-castigation when, as he described it later, all hell broke loose.

Behind Nastarian, the turbolift doors swished open. The scientist began to turn, his face contorting with fury at this intrusion, but before he could complete the movement he was caught in a stun beam from a phaser held in the hand of one of the three Security men inside the lift. Nastarian stiffened, eyes glazing over, and began to fall, but as he did so his arm jerked upwards and the phial of Nastar B flew from his hand, arcing high in the air before beginning its long fall towards the deck.

For all those on the Bridge time seemed to stand still. Their eyes were fixed on the tiny, tumbling glass container. Kirk flung himself forward out of his chair but he felt as though he was moving

through cotton wool. He knew he wasn't going to reach it in time to prevent it's smashing on the deck - but he had to try - however hopeless, he had to try...

And then a hand at the end of a long, blue-clad arm was scooping it gently out of the air mere inches from disaster and Spock, whose Vulcan reflexes had set him in motion ahead of anyone else, was handing it to McCoy and saying calmly,

"Perhaps you would be good enough to look after this, Doctor."

Later, when Nastarian had been sedated and put under restraint and the phial of Nastar B was once more locked away securely, McCoy returned to the Bridge loudly demanding explanations.

"Spock, tell me something - without those tapes of Giotto's, could you have proved that Nastarian and Edge were in cahoots - if he hadn't broken, that is?"

"There are no tapes, Bones," Kirk said.

"No tapes? But... Spock said..."

"I know what I said, Doctor. Nevertheless, the Captain is correct. No tapes have been recorded anywhere on this ship since 19.32 hours last evening, due to an equipment malfunction."

"Did you know...?"

Spock nodded.

McCoy's face split into a wide grin. "Spock, you pulled a bluff - and it worked. I didn't think you had it in you!" He sobered abruptly. "What if it *hadn't* worked? Did you have any proof?"

Spock shrugged slightly. "The deaths of Dr. Nastarian's wife and child, and his visit to Earth and stopover at Space Station K7 are matters of record, Doctor, and the only verifiable facts I had. Everything else was merely my personal conclusions - and subjective impressions would hardly be acceptable in a court of law."

McCoy stared at him. "In other words..."

"I couldn't have proved a thing, Doctor," Spock said. "Even Dr. Edge's final words, which with hindsight can now be recognised as an apology for failure, not for her actions, would not be considered evidence, although I was convinced that there was something wrong with them."

"Intuition, Spock?" McCoy said drily.

"Intonation, Doctor. I have often noted that you Humans can take the same words and give them totally different meanings simply by the tone of voice in which they are uttered. For the kind of apology it was supposed to be, Dr. Edge's tone of voice was all wrong."

"You call it what you like - I'll call it intuition." McCoy turned to Kirk. "Something else I'd like to know, Jim, is how Giotto and his men just happened to arrive at that particular moment - and not only arrive but arrive loaded for bear! I've heard of

coincidence, but that was ridiculous!"

"Nothing coincidental about it, Bones," Kirk said. "Spock and Raeburn sent for them."

"Sent for them?" McCoy gasped. "How? When?"

Raeburn went red to the ears again under his startled scrutiny. "My - my dizzy spell, Doctor. When I fell forward across the console I was trying to open an emergency channel down to Security, but I - I just wasn't quick enough to get away with it. Luckily, Mr. Spock saw what I was up to - " He looked appealingly at Spock.

"That is why I created a fuss about the Ensign's condition, Doctor." Spock continued the explanation smoothly. "While Dr. Nastarian was distracted by the actions of the Ensign and yourself in the Bridge well, I was able to finish what Mr. Raeburn had started and secure the channel open."

"And I thought you'd developed a spot of finer feeling!" McCoy muttered.

Spock ignored the interruption. "From that moment every word spoken here was heard in the Security section. That was why I was at pains to make it clear that we were by the command chair and that Dr. Nastarian was standing by the turbolift, so that Mr. Giotto would know exactly where the danger lay before he arrived."

"But you kept trying to get him to move," McCoy protested.

"In such a way as to irritate him, and thus ensure that he stayed where he was. Human nature is very predictable," Spock added smugly, earning himself a scowl.

"You still took quite a chance though, didn't you?" McCoy retorted. "What if Giotto had called back up here when they started getting that strange transmission down in Security? What if he hadn't reacted, if he'd waited for orders before charging to the rescue? I think you got lucky, Spock!"

"Luck had nothing to do with it, Doctor," Spock said coolly. "Mr. Giotto has demonstrated on numerous occasions that he is an intelligent and efficient Security Commander. I relied on that proven fact, not on random factors."

McCoy threw his hands in the air. "Smart-ass Vulcan! You've got an answer for everything, haven't you?" He grinned at Kirk and began to chuckle. "And no-one, least of all me, believes a word of it! Bluffing - an attack of intuition - taking chances - Spock, old son, your Human half got out from under with a vengeance, didn't it?"

Spock, without moving a facial muscle, managed to convey the information that he had been grossly insulted. Kirk found his own lips beginning to twitch as McCoy's chuckles got louder.

"It's the Galileo business all over again, Jim, but he ain't gonna admit anything now any more than he did then! One of these days, Spock, you won't have an excuse and I'll be able to prove you acted like a Human being just for a change - just you wait and see if I don't!"

He clapped Spock on the shoulder and stomped off the Bridge, still chuckling. Kirk let the grin take over. Things were back to

normal. He glanced up at Spock and caught a glimpse of something suspiciously like affection in the dark eyes as they gazed after the departing Doctor, before the Vulcan turned back towards the Science station, murmuring something under his breath.

"What did you say, Spock?"

"Sir?"

"I thought I heard you say something."

One slanted eyebrow arched innocently. "You must be mistaken, sir."

For someone who says he doesn't lie you do a very passable imitation, Mister, Kirk thought. Aloud, he said, "I guess I must be, Mr. Spock. Come to think of it, it didn't sound like you at all!"

He leaned back in the command chair and watched the lean figure of his First Officer return to his station.

He hadn't been mistaken. He knew what he'd heard. And he'd give a year of his life to see McCoy's expression if he told him.

But there was no way he could do that!

The good Doctor would undoubtedly certify as unfit for duty any Captain who claimed to have heard a certain Vulcan mutter *In a pig's eye* in an almost perfect imitation of the said Doctor's Georgia drawl.

